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THE DIARY

OF

AN IDLE WOMAN IN SICILY.

VOL. I.

THE DIARY

OF

AN IDLE WOMAN IN SICILY.

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BY

FRANCES ELLIOT,

AUTHOR OF

"PICTURES OF OLD ROME," "OLD COURT-LIFE IN FRANCE," ETC.

IN TWO VOLUMES.—VOLUME I.

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TO

MY FRIENDS AT MANIACE

THIS DIARY

IS

AFFECTIONATELY DEDICATED.

PREFACE.

WHILST correcting the proofs of this little work, news comes to me that my good friend "Physic" is dead.

Peace be to his kindly memory!

Of the work itself it only remains to say, that the "Idle Woman" hopes to continue it to Palermo and Girgenti, and to carry her readers with her.

The address appended shows she is abroad. The very utmost has been done to prevent mistakes and misprints. Should, however, anything have been overlooked, she hopes to correct these in a Second Edition.

HOTEL METROPOLITAIN,
Rue Cambon, Paris.

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DIARY OF AN IDLE WOMAN IN SICILY.

CHAPTER I.

First sight of Sicily.—Mythological Associations.—Stations on the Line.—When shall I get to Reggio?—A 'cute dog.

PERHAPS it was six o'clock in the morning, perhaps seven—the sun was shining brightly.

It woke me. I sat up in the solitary *compartimento* where I had passed the night coming from Rome to Bari and Taranto, down the coast line of Calabria, rubbed my eyes, dashed down the window, and looked out.

Was it clouds? Or a mirage? A dream? Or a vision of that paradise to which all good people are hastening? Ah! let me gaze at it before it melts away!

That anything so lovely could be real, never came into my head!

Across the sparkling sea, some twenty miles ahead, the island of Sicily rises before me, purple and blue, and opaline, shaded in tints no human hand can paint, a stupendous mass of piled up mountains, sweeping down in heavenly lines to meet the azure sea. Nothing but mountains, not a span of level land, with Etna throned in the blue sky—a dome of dazzling snow, towering above all!

Along the golden sand just tipped with creamy surf, town after town, village, burg, and tower, bluff, cape, and castle-topped headland, rocky promontory, bay, and bight—come gradually into view like a procession. To each curve of the beauteous coast answers an echoing curve of beauteous sea, spread over with masses of flitting light and shade, soft morning mist and purple mysteries lingering from night. A hundred arcs answer to a hundred indentations and wide sweeps; rocky barriers break into needle points, and there are broad forelands of rich and glowing hues, brown, porphyry-red, and sage.

Weary as I am after nearly forty hours' continuous travelling, I mentally decide that I

would willingly perform the distance twice over to behold such a sight.

At this moment we are slowly steaming along the sandy coast of Eastern Calabria, amid an undergrowth of cactus and tamarisk, close to the sea. As each moment brings me nearer, the more does the beauty of that Sicilian shore grow upon me. Where the gods lived and walked like men, cannot surely be a mere work-a-day world like any other. Sorrow and pain and death can never enter this island of the blest, as fresh, and fair, and young as when Proserpine gathered flowers in Enna's perfumed woods, and Ceres lit her torch at Etna's cone.

The clearness of the air, the brilliancy of hues, the ever-changing form of that Neptunian chain—Poseidon's mountains, with their mysteries of rift and fissure, Cyclops-haunted cave, and Nereid-dwelling grotto, the great volcano opposite with its familiar memories of Ulysses and his fleet, Æneas, Empedocles, the Giant Enceladus—ah! who can paint it?

I hate my pen for being so incapable.

I would fly with the wind to be across, but on *this* side, at all events, I am in a prosaic world.

Our train, as if weary of its long journey, is

horribly deliberate; it stops at every miserable little station, and creaks and groans through many a rocky tunnel, from which it is a blessing to escape, and have a fresh peep at Sicily.

Pallizzi, Bova, Salini Lazzaro, Pellaro, San Gregorio, (Hercules must have had "a bad time of it," driving those wilful cattle of Geryon's along this weary shore), the best but dirty villages, sometimes only one house—when will it end?

Elysium is in front, and we are dawdling on in an earthly purgatory of ugliness!

We pass Pentedattilo, the station below, the town poised aloft on a dolomitic rock, shooting upwards like the pointed fingers of a hand, the houses nestling in the slits; then we glide among prickly pear hedges and yuccas, exotic flowers flash out on the red earth, and glossy thickets of orange and citron shut out the sea, over which the purple mountains of Sicily rise sweetly.

This Calabrian coast seems to be riming itself to meet its beautiful island-neighbour, as they draw nearer to each other. Olive trees come fluttering down from the hard-lined rocks, umbrageous carobbias throw a sombre gloom, aloes stand forth in dignified reserve, and a palm, here and there, raises its rounded head.

The scent of some late-blooming jessamine is in the air, and the fiery globes of the pomegranate light up the groves. Behind frown the dark flanks of Aspromonte, where Garibaldi lay wounded on the mountain-side, to the eternal shame of Italy!

But what matters Aspromonte—a sturdy, ilex-planted, mountain ridge, running like a backbone through the centre of the Calabrias, or Garibaldi, or patriotism, or anything, with entrancing, fantastic Sicily dazzling my eyes in front? Sicily bathed in the morning sunshine, the golden lights playing upon peak, ravine, and cliff, and the eleven thousand feet of Etna glistening like some huge diamond set in blue! Shall I ever get to Reggio? Shall I ever see Messina?

I cannot look down the Straits, there are so many curves, and capes, and bays; but I can guess where the harbour of Messina must be—hid behind the arm of a sweeping promontory ahead, and I feel that the sight of a *city* would give just that touch of human interest, wanting in this scene of vague delight.

My eyes becoming accustomed to the glittering island before me, I see that where Etna uprises above the Cape of Passaro running out

in one long continuous line into the sea, all other mountains shrink back abashed, that its base is so enormous—(a hundred miles)—it detracts from its height; that the side nearest me, the poetic side of the Cyclops, Odysseus, and Æneas (Æneas was more fortunate than I, for he saw the Cyclops fighting on the shore as he sailed by) forms the horn of the Bay of Catania; that there is not the smallest vestige of smoke, and that, but for the depression of a well-marked crater, three miles round, one would only think it, of all mountains, the most grave and impassive.

By-and-by, running in nearer to the Sicilian shore, the straits narrow into the semblance of an elongated lake, the grand range of the Taurus (Neptunian) mountains, topped by Monte Venere over Taormina, heaped pile upon pile, shuts out the outline of Etna, and nearer heights, jagged, peaked, and indented, press forward to take their place. I can just make out the faint blue line of Cape Schiso, the southern extremity of what once was ancient Naxos, the first Greek settlement in Sicily, and that must be Portus Ulyssis under Aci, but there is such a confusion of beautiful headlands and promontories that I know nothing surely.

"Shall we ever get to Reggio?" I ask the

question of a swarthy guard. He does not answer me.

The train is lingering at one of those endless little stations, for no purpose, apparently, but to allow this individual to fondle a dog, evidently alive to the dangers of his position as a dog upon the rail.

The guard is trying his best to tempt him forward on the line, but no coaxing will induce the animal to stir an inch beyond a certain limit of self-imposed boundary, he, in his canine wisdom, has proposed to himself—a very sage among dogs!

He is old and ugly, but '*cute*, and with a beseeching eye turned upon passengers, as for a chance crumb, which not getting, he retreats to the platform with the extremest care, always on the prescribed line, crest-fallen though affectionate.

Now without seeing a single house, we creak into a bare, dusty barn.

This is the station of Reggio. I look at my watch. I have been in the train for forty hours, starting from Rome to Caserta the night before last.

It is ordained that travellers bound for Foggia, Bari, and the southern line to Reggio, need not touch at Naples; so we were turned

off in the middle of the night at the Caserta Junction, one hour from Naples. As it was raining a deluge, I should have blessed the railroad authorities for even a tilt to protect me, but in their wisdom they saw it otherwise, and I commenced my journey with a wetting.

CHAPTER II.

Beautiful Messina.—Gods and Heroes.—The Straits.—Ancient Rhegium and Modern Reggio.

YES, there is Messina, Portæ Siciliæ, across the Fretum Siculum!

Not straight across, after all, the ancient Zancle, but just a little to the right of Reggio, towards the other end of the channel at Faro (Pelorus). And there, too, puffing away beside the Reggian mole, is Florio's tiny steamer, which is to ferry us four miles across.

If I say that Messina is a jewel worthy of its setting, and that I find it capable of giving that last touch of human interest to the vague delight of those bewildering mountains which have maddened me with their beauty since early morning, will you understand me?

Throned against a perpendicular background of many-tinted heights, Messina sits like a queen, her white robes sweeping to the

sea. Never was a city so exquisitely poised between earth and sky!

On a narrow strait between two great seas, her lines of endless quays, bordered by snowy palaces, her sickle-shaped harbour, with its far-stretching arm and castle of defence (the sun bringing out every detail, as though it prized each particular stone), the exquisite vista down the straits; on one side the shelving terraces of the Calabrian mountains, melting off into harmonious waves of cape and bay; the Castle of Scylla, on the summit of a rugged bluff; the sandy point of Faro, and its lighthouse, midway in the straits (both point and lighthouse seem to touch the mainland and to landlock the straits, but in reality the channel there is two miles across); on the other side, low-lying Charybdis and a range of purple mountains —all make a picture so perfect, so exquisite in itself, I sigh to think that Sicily has a history!

And such a history! Gods and demi-gods, heroes and nymphs, Nereids and Cyclopes, Sicanians, Siculians, Phenicians, and Greeks, invaders from every land, conquerors from every shore—in all ages, since all time—a weight felt as of useless knowledge while gazing on these enchanting shores!

How delicious it would be to have nothing

to chronicle but the land itself! To paint the play of sunshine on palmetto-clothed heights, the beds of sea-pinks fluttering to the light, the foam of white sea-surf dashing against lava-cliffs, the warm shadows slanting across vine-pergolas, the deep blue tinting in the bosom of the hills, and ever-varying mountain lines wandering heavenwards!

These are my thoughts, standing on the quay at Reggio, while my maid, surnamed the Furiosa, from certain marked peculiarities of temper, marshals the luggage into a tossing boat which is to convey passengers aboard Florio's steamer, tossing at anchor.

The warm air beating on my face, the straits sparkling and glittering with white-tipped waves, the bulging lateen sails of the fishing-boats flying by, the merchant vessels and large steamers from Naples, Malta, and Taranto rolling in the trough of the waves, the yachts that toss and plunge like water-fowl, the murmur of the water lapping against the quay, the hoarse cries of the boatmen, the snatch of a tune whistled by a boy, the voices of the passengers—some in, some out of the boat—all come to me with a triumphant sense that Sicily is no longer a myth, a shadow; that it lies before me there, my *own*,

my *very own*—Beautiful, Unknown, Perilous, Enticing!

Of Reggio, ancient Rhegium, I can tell you but little. I had no eyes for anything but Sicily. It was first colonized from mother Greece, then from Zancle (Messina), just as Messina was colonized from Grecian Naxos (these colonial Greeks soon understood the advantage of quiet neighbours of their own flesh and blood).

From all time, Zancle and Rhegium have stared at each other across the straits, dissevered in history, in epochs, in feeling. Rhegium was, as it were, the portal of Sicily; races and nations entered there, but passed on as I do, which takes all permanent interest from it.

Modern Reggio is a flat, uninteresting, dirty little town, without a vestige of its great antiquity. One long, rattling street begins at the straits, and ends vaguely in the prospect of a bare-flanked mountain. The dust is intolerable, the people are half-naked, insolent and ugly.

What we went through, Furiosa and I, in our passage to the steamer, with the ancient mariners of Reggio, how they cursed and bellowed at us, and dived wildly among our

boxes, how Furiosa, developing her characteristic gifts, got all on end like bristles, gave it them back again, rescued the boxes, screamed in Teutonic Italian, and finally prevailed in paying what she chose—their hungry, brown fingers almost tearing the paper money from her hand; how the bargain once made, the ancient mariners quieted down, and conversed with us quite affably, as they dug their awkward oars into the waves, and how we finally landed on the deck of the tiny steamer—I shall not further say.

St. Paul did quite right "to fetch a compass and sail from Rhegium." I follow his example. As a great historic centre, where the annals of Greece, Rome, Byzantium, Arragon and Naples meet, clash, and separate, I must often refer to it; otherwise, I personally wipe out Reggio altogether, as the earthquakes have done so often.

I had a letter for the Prefect in my pocket, but I would not have delivered it or done anything to lengthen my stay, for the world; so with my face steadily fixed on Sicily, I go forward.

CHAPTER III.

Queen Messina.—The Sikel Harbour.—Earthly Birth.—Perfidious City.—Dionysius, Timoleon and Agathocles.—The Sons of Mars.—Hiero and Rome.—Saracens and Normans.—Cœur de Lion.—Charles of Anjou.—Where are your Lovers now.—Peter of Arragon.—Wrinkles on your Brow.—The Grand Monarque.—Garibaldi.

FLORIO'S little steamer rocks and heaves. These straits are a miniature edition of our Channel, the same strong currents, the same rocky bottom, the same massed-up ocean at either end, struggling to get free. A cat does not hate the sight of water more than I; nevertheless, on this occasion, I waive my antipathy, and stay on deck, for there, before me, is Messina.

Majestic avenues of white palaces rise above the waves, and long lines of snowy quays, broken by wide flights of steps, now detach themselves from the mass. There are noble

arcades and broad spanning arches, fountains and statues and balustrades. Gay villas and dainty pavilions peep out like gaudy flowers among the hills, and a world of blackening masts bristle within the spacious harbour, bounded by the low green banks of the sickle barrier—arsenal, lazaretto, and citadel are within this curve, of which the castle of San Salvador guards the narrow entrance. I seem to touch it with my finger!

Etna is there—to my right, towering high amid a magnificent panorama of mountain. To my left, low down lies Faro, and the Point of Pelorus, the narrow-mouth of the Straits; the boundless ocean beyond, and a world of ruddy cliffs, and hills, gorges and valleys on the Calabrian Apennines behind.

Very beautiful you are, Messina, looking out over the sea, with that fair white face; the poetic lines of your mountains draping around you; the azure straits gliding past you in homage, and bringing the world's treasures to your feet; very beautiful, but false and fickle, and cowardly in all the phases of your history, a ready victim to every invader, a facile prey, ever siding with the strongest!

When Kronos, father of Demeter, ruled in Sicily, he dropped his sickle upon the waters,

from his home on the crown of the Pelorian mountains, and named you Zancle!

Straightway your harbour took the curved form it bears.

Later on, came Orion, a mighty hunter imported from the east—gigantic, bold, a kind of Phenician Nimrod, dwelling like Kronos on mountain tops, Orion, architect as well as hunter, built and strengthened your walls, and fortified your sickle-harbour.

Such is your mythic origin, Queenly Messina.

The history of your earthly birth is not so clear as that of your neighbours, Catania, Leontini or Syracuse. It is said that the Chalcydian Greeks from Eubœa, in the Archipelago, settled on the gold-rimmed bay of Naxos, near Taormina, sent out a colony to people you. Strabo calls you "an off-shoot from Naxos," though you have lost every vestige of classic origin, except the soft Greek name you bear. Others say that Greeks from Ionia and Samos were your god-fathers; but call you by whatever name you please,—Zancle, Messina or Messana,—you never knew what freedom meant, nor honour.

Greek as you were you betrayed your Grecian brethren in the great struggle between Athens and Syracuse, when Rhegium was

faithful. And then again, your servile temper showed itself with the Carthaginians, when, spite of Orion's strong walls and dykes, and your noble harbour of defence, you permitted Himilcon to win you without a struggle.

Next comes the turn of Dionysius, the Syracusan tyrant, who drove out Himilcon and saved Sicily. For this service you, Messana, unable to defend yourself, owe to Dionysius—not otherwise a humane character—a second birth.

But after Dionysius, you again fell, pusillanimous Beauty, and became the prey of other Cathaginians; until Timoleon, the Corinthian, drove them out, as he drove them out at Syracuse.

And yet again another conqueror enters the sickle-harbour—Agathocles, fresh from his African conquests. A very different man he, to the "just Timoleon," beginning his strange career as a potter's son at Thermæ, and ending it as a king! We shall meet with Agathocles again at Syracuse. So he too comes, one of so many, to pass the yoke of conquest round your neck, Messana, fairest of cities!

Next in order arrive those sons of Mars, the Mamertines (from Mamertium, the present Oppido in the Gulf of Gioia, beyond the Cape

of Faro, mercenaries and robbers called into Sicily by the endless wars.

These Mamertines visit Messina on their return to the mainland as *friends;* as *friends* they plunder what Agathocles had left; as *friends* they murder the men, and dishonour their wives and daughters.

A very woman in submission, Messina bows her head and bears it; nay, so deep is her degradation, that without striking a blow in her own defence, she allows these ignoble pirates to blot out even her very name, and, as she changed from Zancle to Grecian Messana, now she becomes Mamertina!

But not for long. Beauty such as yours, Messina, commands protectors!

Sailing round the Cape of Pachynus (Passaro), under Etna's shadow, comes help from Syracuse, in the person of Hiero!

For a brief space, Hiero fills the oft-changing foreground of your many-hued shore, defeats the Mamertines, who call out wildly, some on Rome, some on Carthage, for help, then disappear from the historic scene, they, and the new name they gave you.

Again, you are Grecian Messana, surnamed the Beautiful!

Now this Hiero who drives out the Mamer-

tines, is both virtuous and merciful, according to the standard of that day. He rules you, Messina, justly but sternly, knowing your fickle mind.

Was ever such a helpless, changeful city! Tired of Hiero, she calls Imperial Rome to Sicily.

Rome answers to the call without inquiry into motives, all too willingly. Generals, and consuls, and prætors, with train of triremes, and legions, quinqueremes, and transports come bustling across the straits.

If Grecian Helen was accursed by gods and men for causing the fall of Troy, what do you merit, selfish Messina, for this bringing in of Rome? By the Punic wars you caused more sieges, massacres, invasions and carnage than fifty Grecian Helens.

Timoleon, Agathocles, Dionysius, the ignoble Mamertines, Hiero of Syracuse, Carthage, or Rome, it is all the same to you, Messina.

The great Pompey passed by in the civil wars with Cæsar and admired you; and Octavianus, and Pompey's son, Sextus Pompeius, caressed you. But there is little more to tell worthy of record, except that you kept your lovely person intact, by submitting in turn to every master!

Again you bend your fair neck, in the ninth century, to the Saracens; sovereigns at Palermo and Syracuse, careering, like their progenitors the Carthaginians, unchecked over the Tyrrhenian seas, now that the Empire of Rome and Eastern Rome (Byzantium) have ceased to rule the West.

The Saracens are strong enough to hold you firmly and long—too long, indeed, to suit your disposition. Tired of Saracen, Arab, and Moor (all notes of the same chord), again you raise your white head over the mountain-tops, and this time call upon a new nation, the Normans, to come in.

The Normans are a romantic fashion of men, chestnut-haired, fair-skinned, and blue-eyed; very brave and bold, robbers and buccaneers to a man, if truth be told, yet with a fine sense of justice, honour, and mercy; altogether a band of light-handed, easy-going young knights, with no great sense of the distinction of *meum* and *tuum*, but carrying a clear certificate of good work done: first, as pirates in France, then as robbers in Apulia; later, mercenaries at Salerno, Capua, and Naples; and now, after incredible luck, rulers in the two Calabrias and the Abruzzi.

After all, Messina, you were monstrously

ungrateful. You were very well treated by the Saracens, a much more civilized race than the Normans, with laws, science, and arts—poetic in speech, graceful in manners, refined in habits. It was but a dirty trick to call in secretly those wild-riding young Northmen—marauders all; but with a romantic halo round their Gallic name of Hauteville, felt in all history.

Che vuole? It is Messina's way to be treacherous. She welcomes with rapture a new master—a master and a lover; for Roger declares, when he has won the city, that he loves it, and will hold it to the end—he and his race for ever!

There is a little episode at Messina, about this time, worthy of note. Richard Cœur de Lion pauses here on his way to the Crusades, and marries within her walls Berengaria of Navarre, who has arrived chaperoned by his mother, haughty, wicked Queen Eleanor. The marriage festivals light up the face of the splendid quays, the torches flare across the face of palaces, and the English fleet, gathered in Orion's sickle-harbour, blazes with *feux-de-joie*. Then Richard sails to Palestine.

As time progresses, the Normans go the way of all flesh—Tancred, and William, and

Frederic II., and last of all, Manfred, at the fatal bridge of Benevento.

Instead of their handsome, fair faces, flowing hair, and ready arms for every deed of knightly valour, Charles of Anjou comes from Provence, dark, thin, and hollow-cheeked. Charles is brother of Saint Louis, King of France; no saint, indeed, himself, but a man of steel, with heart of bronze; avaricious, revengeful, cruel, blasting, as with a curse, each land he touches. How Charles tramples on Sicily with iron heel, and especially tramples on you, voluptuous Queen, throned on your golden shore, is too long for me to tell.

No one now to aid you, bewitching Messina! Nothing but fierce fighting between Sicilians and French, and the hard reality of the Sicilian Vespers; and patriotic John of Procida massacring all Charles' troops and swaggering officers; and Charles vowing vengeance for the French blood shed at Palermo, falling in headlong fury on your painted shores!

Alas! where are your friends and lovers now, palace-lined Queen? Of what avail your wiles and enchantments, your tricks and your coquetries? Lonely you sit on your purple hills, and gather your white skirts within your walls, manned by your bravest citizens!

Once, and once only, you defend yourself. It is against this terrible enemy, Charles of Anjou; and it must be confessed you do it well; your very women mount the walls to fight!

But, Charles repulsed, you soon fall back into your luxurious beauty-airs, under the southern sun, which makes his home with you, and prepare to receive a Spanish master, Peter of Arragon.

Messina—Lady! as I see you now from the deck of Florio's steamer, you are as fair as ever. The lapse of ages has not withered your grand face, nor perpetual servitude soiled the enchanting colours that mark you Beautiful among cities. Yet there are signs of conquest on your broad, white brow, wrinkles, one may say, upon the surface of your walls (a mosaic, of Phenician, Carthaginian, Roman, Saracen, and Norman, rising black upon your hills). The Emperor Charles V., one of your many masters, riveted and strengthened them. Those round towers, too, Rocca Guelfonia, for instance, half Carthaginian, half Roman (we will call it a mole upon your blooming cheek), catch my eye as I near the harbour. The Bastione Vittoria, too, a huge excrescence, projecting forward on a red-tinted rock, marks an ugly scar upon your marble-tinted throat, in-

flicted during the siege of your bitter enemy, Charles of Anjou; and half a mile distant, through orange orchards and hanging vineyards, I can see the bastion of Don Blasco, some Spanish governor, who died and left his mark.

Monte Griffone, another fortress, calls Richard Cœur de Lion father. Castle Gonzaga, on a wooded peak, is another Spanish souvenir of possession, like a link upon a chain. Spanish too, the Citadel of San Salvatore, down in the harbour—a fell device of sternest rock and stone, to hold you captive, fairest of vassals!

For, be it known, seductive Queen, your wiles and arts for alluring men and nations continued down to a late period!

Your last victim was pompous, bewigged, old Louis XIV. How you fascinated him in his old age, who can tell?

Spite of earthquakes and pestilence—(the earthquakes must have maintained you in perpetual youth, for you have renewed yourself each time they have destroyed you)—you call the "Grand Monarque" to your shores, to aid you against Naples, and trim your palace-homes, and don your sweetest smiles to meet him. But either Louis' hands are full of

Spanish Successions, or Edicts of Nantes, or Jesuits, or Madame de Maintenon, or he is ashamed, at his age, to figure side-by-side with you, venal, tempting Messina!—and he does not come!

So you have to put up with Neapolitan tyrants, in the shape of governors, who are rude and coarse, and gag and bind you with sharp-cutting cords and chains, and score your royal form with walls and towers, until your cowardly heart is well-nigh broken.

Last of all in the list of your conquerors comes Don Quixote Garibaldi, with his red shirt, stepping down over the Pelorian mountains, from Calatafimi and Marsala, in the west.

Garibaldi, a grave man, unfit to dally with a Syren such as you, unites you in lawful marriage with Victor Emanuel, first King of United Italy. On the marriage ring is marked—"Liberty." Let us hope you will keep it unbroken!

CHAPTER IV.

Land Pirates.—Fight for Luggage.—Walls of Golden Sunshine.—Furiosa and the Facchini.—Myself a Prisoner.—Gallant Rescue.

IN the time of the Renaissance, a strong-minded woman, "such as men honour," was called a virago. Now, unless you feel within you the makings of a virago—take my advice—do not venture alone to Sicily.

Hunger, ignorance, swarthy skins, volubility, savage familiarity, a minimum of clothes, and a maximum of gesture, dirt, noise, and fleas, announce the sunny south, all the world over.

But on arriving at Messina I found all this exaggerated. For a moment I thought Florio's little steamer was boarded by a band of pirates. Over the sides came ragged men, clustering as thick as bees, large-eyed, shock-headed, fierce, casting their brown limbs about, like branches swept by storms.

In an instant we are engaged in a free fight: Furiosa charging valiantly in front, over our boxes (the average is four men to each box), I in the rear, defending the shawls and the bags.

Screams, oaths, threats from the passengers, grappling hands, and menaces, from the pirates.

Not a Guardia pubblica in sight. They never are. They might be "compromised," so prudently retire.

We make a gallant defence, Furiosa and I, but are ignominiously defeated, and behold our luggage, hoisted pell-mell on the shoulders of our invaders, disappear down the side of the steamer.

How every thing in the struggle did not go over into the water, and we after it, I cannot understand. By some miracle, in a wild chorus of yells and howls, I find myself in the same boat with my excited maid and our luggage, in company with two dark grinning boatmen, triumphantly swaying to and fro on their naked feet, as they row us rapidly towards the quay. Arrived before what, in the hurry and the dazzle of the moment, seemed to me walls of golden sunshine, I find a fresh crowd, gesticulating, naked and audacious, stretching out broad arms to receive us. These again fall

upon the luggage by right of custom—they are facchini. The pirates offer no resistance. When we left the steamer we belonged to them. Now we are the lawful prey of the land-sharks.

I should mention that the distance from the steamer to the quay, might occupy in time two minutes. The hotel, I learn, is one of the marble palaces, dazzling my eyes across the road.

Now is it that Furiosa merits her name and covers herself with glory.

On the summit of the broad marble steps she stands, a thin diminutive figure, with colourless face and imperceptible hair, midway between two opposing forces—the pirates behind in the boat, the facchini in front, on the steps, swooping down over our two modest little boxes. The pirates roar for pay, leaning over the boat side; the facchini, a dozen hands at least, recruited by some sepia-coloured boys, and a tall classic-nosed woman, with a coloured cloth folded upon her head, raise the boxes in the air, and clamour for pay also. Quite unmoved, Furiosa unclasps the money-bag she wears round her waist, and presents the pirates with fourpence. Shrieks, howls and groans!

"Not a centesimo more," cries Furiosa, shutting up her thin lips and the clasp of the money-bag like a vice; "and as for you," she

continues, with the most perfect calm, addressing the dozen facchini who have managed to lade themselves with our two boxes, "I choose two;" here she touches a sort of Ethiop with no hair, and an eager-eyed creature, who looks as if he had not tasted food for a week. "Now *avanti.* Take up those two boxes, and follow me."

This *coup-de-main* carries us on to the quay. I perceive already a good deal of bounce about these ferocious islanders; also an abject surrender to any show of authority, and as I see Furiosa disappear in a pell-mell of sailors, porters and swarthy boys, in the direction of the hotel, I conceive a contempt for Sicilian bravura, that time and experience only strengthen.

Being on the subject, let me note that, arrived in our apartment, I underwent a formal siege on the part of the two facchini. Naturally, as they bore the boxes on their backs into the room, they effected that which is most important in all sieges—an entrance. This advantage they preserved doggedly. To look at, they were two as disgusting facchini as I ever beheld; on their naked feet they took up their position.

Nothing would move them. Furiosa would have died rather than have given them one farthing more than the tariff due for crossing the road. They on their part showed every

inclination to starve us out, if they did not get more. And I was so hungry!

I implored Furiosa to give them what they wanted. "No," and she tossed her flaxen curls in derision. "No, Never," she repeated, eyeing the two men with scorn.

I appealed to a fat girl acting as chamber-maid, who blesses me at intervals during the day (*Dio ti benedica*), to a waiter in a suspicious coat and greasy neck-tie. Both made as though they did not hear me. The waiter disappeared. The fat girl whispers into my ear, in a Sicilian brogue I could scarcely understand, affecting to be diligently dusting a looking-glass all the while she speaks, "They would follow me at night, and——" here a significant pantomime at the same time cut her phrase and her throat!

"How much do these facchini want, Marie?" (Marie was her real name, Furiosa a nickname). The facchini had never ceased a jabber of *patois*. They displayed their brawny arms, thrust forward their naked feet, shook their black rags, pointed to their open mouths like young birds gaping for food, then to the modest boxes, still corded and travel-stained, lying helpless on the floor.

"Four francs," screamed Furiosa, in her

strongest German accent; "four francs for crossing the road."

"In your interests, Madame, I cannot give it. Madame has not travelled in Sicily. If you once let yourself be *mangiata* (eaten) one tells another, and you will spend a fortune."

"But, Marie, we must get rid of these men. We must dine." At this point the Ethiop facchini resolutely seated himself on one of the boxes, and fumbled in his pocket for his pipe.

"Look here," cried Furiosa, squaring herself before him; "here are two francs, double what you have a right to—*Bestia!*" (This word introduced as a *fioritura*, or agreeable figure of speech, was very effective.) "If you do not clear out instantly, I will go to the Questura."

Before she had done speaking, both the facchini were out of the room, and we had locked the door, and were uncording our boxes, quicker than I can write.

CHAPTER V.

Our Hotels.—Distracting Prospects.—The Cry of the Beggars.—Teutons at the Table d'hote.—Good Wine.

HAVE said that our hotel forms one of that line of dazzling palaces seen from the straits. The grand simplicity of this sea façade stamps Messina as a great capital before you master a single detail. Some columns divide the lofty windows, and a sculptured cornice supports the upper floor. The Palazzetta, as it is called, has quite a history. Overthrown by the great earthquake of 1783, it was rebuilt in 1848. In many parts it has not been carried up to its original height, hence a slight architectural incongruity.

The ground floors are chiefly shops, or rather holes, generally not paved, incredibly foul and stinking, where a low lazzarone population cluster. Besides the Hotel Vittoria along the line, are the Palazzo della Città, the Custom

house, health office, banks, cafés, and restaurants—palaces alike, and alike majestic.

The Vittoria, the only tolerable hotel in Messina, and that is not saying much—is entered from the rear, through one of the nineteen side streets which cut the Palazzetta, under sculptured archways.

And how grandly do these marble barriers frame the view! On one side, the noble harbour, teeming with life and colour; the sickle curve (Zancle) of the breastwork of San Ranieri, as green as fresh grass can make it (Orion, who formed it, being among the stars, it has a Saint now as Patron); the blue, uneasy straits boiling and bubbling towards Cape Faro, the broad Calabrian mountains catching the passing colours of the clouds, and Reggio like a white jewel shining at their base.

But to return to our hotel. I keep forgetting everything but the view, I cannot keep my eyes off it! There are but two stories—the first and the third; the second is quite unattached, a private apartment in fact, into which penetrating by mistake, I frightened an old lady in bed almost into fits.

Between these two stories the household of the hotel slide up and down, holding perilously by the banisters. A chamber-maid, with a

cock in her eye, suggesting language, the harum-scarum girl, she who blesses me, and chatters in a *patois* quite incomprehensible; a scared waiter, with hair on end, always flying, as under the influence of a propelling wind; and a fat man, the *Generalissimo*, or *maître d'hôtel*, who tells me when I hurry him, "That I may eat my food raw if I like, it is all the same to him; only, if *it is to be cooked*, I must wait!"

To these, add hangers-on, boatmen, vetturini, facchini, boxes, barrels, casks, old carriages, horses, mules, carts, and omnibuses—all crammed together down in the cortile, or under arches—and *Beggars!*

Ah! the beggars! I have not been in Sicily half an hour before I am brought to a personal understanding of this curse. "Give, give!" say indescribable crispations of claw-like fingers (you must go there to understand it). "Give, give!" from fever-stricken wretches clustering in festering corners. "Give, give!" from the old—and oh! how horrible in old age!—how reeking! how offensive! "Give, give!" from halt, and maim, and blind, motionless by reason of their infirmities, but all the readier to clutch, and reach, and sign—pointing to sightless eyes and withered limbs. "Give!" from young children, beady-eyed, yellow-skinned, and bony

children, who have never been young, and are now old and stricken in want and vice. "Give!" from despairing mothers, grasping infants so frail and white, one expects to see the spark of life die out then and there while one is looking on. "Give!"—But I have done. It is too horrible!

Broadly speaking, there is no charity in Sicily. Even at Palermo, the capital, they who should know tell me the sick are constantly brought in by their friends to the hospital in carts, and sent back again, twenty or thirty miles distant, jolted over mountain roads, to die, because there is no room for them. Yet, no Prince, or Duke, or Baron—and there are so many at Palermo and elsewhere—proposes to enlarge the hospital, to build others, or to do anything whatever!

At dinner we are thirty, all men except myself, and all Germans. The overwhelming Teutonic element in Sicily must have come in as long ago as the Hohenstaufen marriage of Norman Constance with the son of Barbarossa, and never since gone out.

We gaze at each other through pyramids of mandarin oranges, dates, roses, figs, and cactus-fruit. Germans they are certainly, and bagmen mostly, I believe; fat and oily, twang-

ing out their "*R*'s" and "*Z*'s" emphatically. Each man wears a napkin tucked under his capacious chin, like an overgrown baby, and is ravenous for his food.

The individual opposite me sent his plate away before touching it, because, as he explains to the company generally, "he requires more soup to start with." Another forcibly retains his from the hands of the waiter, because there is still enough to swear by left. My right-hand neighbour barricades himself with a rampart of bread and butter, which he consumes diligently between the courses. Some solemnly remonstrate with the waiters as to supposed slights in the order of handing the dishes; others crack jokes at them over their shoulders—an indiscretion, I am bound to say, the Sicilians meet with silence.

All fall upon the fish—friends passing the word round as to the goodness of the sauce. (We had first been stuffed with salame and maccaroni, to clog the edge of healthy appetite.)

The gravity of everyone, the importance, as of a religious function, is delightful. Eager eyes follow the waiters, as the dispensers of good things; frowns for the offer of a fowl leg or the last cut of a fillet; smiles, and even exclamations of delight, at the chicken's wing.

One stern-faced old Teuton dissects his quail with an eye-glass; another gloats over his glass of Veuve Cliquôt with his spectacles. My friend of the bread and butter—a traveller, as he informs me, in Chinese Tartary, and who has seen the Great Wall, and knows Syria and India like his home—is hurt and offended at the sweet dish (*dolce*), a kind of cake, which he qualifies, reproachfully, as "dry." In return, I suggest "Marsala," a hint he joyfully accepts, shouts for the dish again (the bottle is beside him), and devours it on the spot.

I cannot say much for the cuisine, nor for the waiting; but the wine is first-rate. A bad dinner, often no dinner at all—not even eggs—is frequently the fate of the traveller in Sicily; but the vilest, filthiest village invariably offers you a god-like vintage.

Each city has its wine as well as its history. Grecian Syracuse is great in sweet wines; Lilybœum (Marsala) tells its own tale; Girgenti has an excellent red wine; and so on.

At our table-d'hôte, a light Marsala is included in the dinner at four francs. Marsala is the "vin ordinaire" of Sicily. Why it should give the generic name to all white wines I cannot say, for the white grape is cultivated all over the island.

CHAPTER VI.

An Outburst.—Street Pictures.—Amazing Medley.—Gate of the Promised Land.

AH! the South, it is here! What a swing, and freedom in the life! What busy swarming streets! What laughing, chattering, ogling, intriguing! Naples is nothing to it! More like a scene from "Gil Blas," or the "Barber of Seville," than a flesh and blood town.

These heavy-browed thin-faced men, intense-eyed, dark, slow in movement, and dignified in carriage—are Spanish, not Italian.

The low-storied houses (even in the Corso they are low) have in every window a suggestive balcony, projecting over the street on carved corbels, just the height for Susanna to twirl her fan at Figaro, and for Rosina to coquette with Count Almaviva, and show herself gracious as to the "Serenade."

The veil, or shawl thrown over the women's

head, not of choice point indeed, but of knitted worsted, is Spanish too; also, the broad-hatted priests, so sleek and indecorous, lingering in the street-corners with dark-eyed beauties (positively I am told the priests' morals are shocking, but as men they are very picturesque); the writing-tables set up under archways, or beside a crowded thoroughfare, at the risk of being whisked bodily off by some passing cart-wheel; an old scribe seated at one, his pen touching his nose, his head on one side to match his perpendiculars, beside him a sad-faced matron, her head concealed by a shawl, pouring something into his ear, which he slowly engrosses. A young man is the writer at the next table close by—the tables generally work in pairs; I have seen as many as eight pairs, side by side, in a convenient portico, all fully occupied—a young woman is giving out the subject of her letter, in a loud discordant voice, which the young man writes down glibly, without aid from his nose.

The lovely tropical shrubs and flowers in the squares, topsy-turvying the seasons (I do not know the name of half of them, but they send me wild with joy), the abundant fountains, second only to those of Rome; the swagger of the handsome Messinese youths, audacious and picturesque under their mountains; the water-

carriers with classic urns and vases poised on one shoulder like statues; the ragged idlers, the shopmen, even the younger beggars, tripping along as if they loved their life under that glowing vault of heaven; the brilliant market-stalls; the cries of street-sellers, the shouts of boatmen, the crash of merchandise, the architectural vistas, blazing mountains on one side and the blueness of the straits on the other. What a scene!

The painted carts rattle by every instant. The cart, a box upon very high wheels, coloured all over in fresco—a crucifixion on the splash-board, Romulus and Remus on the sides, a ballet girl cutting capers behind, and the wheels running over with angels and cherubim, is the glory of the Sicilian: he will spend half his income to adorn it. The harness, red velvet set in filagree and brass, clinking with bells, and pyramids, and turrets, absolutely obliterating the pretty well-cared-for Sicilian cob, which draws the shafts.

The vivid contrasts of colour—black and yellow, red and blue, green and crimson, dancing along the streets, a remnant of the East, and of the Arab conquest. The glorious sun, oppressive and dazzling at midday (we are within two days of November); the wondrous mountains looking over into the streets; the

laughing Marina, three miles long; the crowd of street passengers; the hurrying to and fro on the quays; the shrill cries of the drivers, the roar of droves of buffaloes; the creaking of the ox-waggons and mule carts (sometimes with the mule, a cow is placed on the off side of the pole, quite sympathetic); the hollow roll of drays, trolleys and vans, piled with vegetables, salt-fish, oil-barrels, sulphur cut into squares, and oranges and almonds; the bewildering light upon the pavement and the walls radiating back like fire; the roar at the port, made up of oaths, engine whistles, and hissing steamers sweeping in and out of the harbour, fleets of fishing-boats, the crews singing choruses as they pass the bar by San Salvador, merchant ships unlading timber and coal.

The dusky groups of Phrygian-capped sailors, hanging about on marble stairs, or bearing incredible burdens on their backs, dancing, quarrelling, lounging, eating, smoking. A wooden theatre, with two day representations of "Pulcinello," announced by a trumpet, an harmonium, and a cow-horn; detachments of Bersaglieri tramping along the thoroughfare, their black cock's plumes waving behind their glazed hats, like storm-clouds; how can I paint it?

Nothing I have seen in Europe can compare with the Marina of Messina. It is longer, more elegant, and more architectural than the Chiaia at Naples; lustier, healthier, rougher, and more pictorial than the mincing refinements of the "Promenade" at Nice, toned down to English fastidiousness; larger, nobler, more motley than the quays at Marseilles; and gayer, friendlier, vaster, than that melancholy sea-walk at Palermo, with its rows of skeleton trees, scathed by innumerable tempests.

Yet Messina is but the gate of the promised land, the threshold, as it were, of bliss!

CHAPTER VII.

Cape Pelorus.—Poseidon, King of Sicily.—"Brothers, Ride Hard!"—Paradise and Peace.—Arrived at Faro.—The Little Horse.

LOVELY morning tinting everything with the pure rainbow colours of Sicily!

Before I visit anything in Messina, I must drive out to Faro. Ever since I came it sends me sunny greetings across the straits. What spot in all Sicily is more historical than Faro? History and mythology positively weigh it down.

Out of a numerous stand on the Corso I select a little Victoria (a Milord they call it here) with a swift pony and a civil driver, who agrees to take me to Faro and back, a good fourteen miles, for ten francs.

How we dashed down the broad Marina, by the characteristic palaces, and under the shadow

of those nineteen archways that break the façades into nineteen streets, each with its background of mountains—on to the great fountain of Neptune, with its balustraded terrace, making a noble curve over the water. (Great Poseidon is the real king of Sicily, whoever nominally governs.)

Here he is very imposing, sea-weedy and dripping; grasping his trident apparently to chastise Scylla and Charybdis bound at his feet. Out at the same pace by the gate of Campo Basso, and so on, to the wide Corniche road bordering the dazzling straits.

To talk of the beauty of any other Corniche road besides this one running from Faro to Catania, is an absurdity. The glory of it is matchless.

The lower line of hills is a paradise of frescoed villas, coloured pavilions, green vine pergolas, casinos, and marble terraces, set in glistening groves. The soft sandy beach is sprinkled with dwarf palms, tamarisk and orange trees; melons, and parti-coloured gourds sprawl like aquatic monsters on the red earth, and the pink cactus fruit hangs flower-like on bristly spikes.

Now we dash down into the dip of a fiumara.

What is that? I hear a voice asking.

A fiumara in summer is a dried up water-course paved for the convenience of the public, a *cosa di Sicilia*, of which you will have enough as you progress on your travels. When rain pours and torrents dash from mountain tops every five minutes, you cannot expect a bridge. Such an idea is utterly preposterous; besides, in bad weather you can pass neither road, nor bridge, nor rail. Poseidon is not king of Sicily for nothing. Roads in his island are constructed for fine weather; in bad weather you must stay at home. Above all, don't complain. You are in a mediæval country and must submit.

A fiumara, or paved water-course, is the legitimate outlet of a gorge to the sea-shore, ripping up, as it were, scenes of unknown and unutterable beauty. If the fiumara were not there, you could not enjoy these peeps into ideal regions! Be thankful, therefore, and, I repeat, do not complain.

The church and convent of San Salvadore dei Greci, a huge modern building, where Charles III. took up his residence, as Charles V. did at Yuste, is the next object.

But San Salvadore has a higher interest than Spanish kings. On this spot Norman Roger raised a votive chapel. Galloping in the early morning from Faro, with his little band of

knights and squires, to surprise the Saracen hosts, Roger turns his eyes upon this cape of land, so conspicuous from the road, and beholds the bodies of twelve Christians crucified on twelve tall poles.

"By St. Michael," cries Roger, reddening with fury at the sight, "these martyrs shall be avenged! If I take Messina, as I know I shall, I vow to build a shrine to their memory. And now, brothers all, ride hard for Messina; we must catch these Moorish infidels before they are awake."

The Norman Rollos, and Drogos, and Williams, galloping beside him, echo his words. There is no time to tarry and bury these twelve Christians then. They are riding towards Messina for life and death; riding on golden sands, among acanthus and myrtles, and over carpets of passiaflora, to raise no echoes. With Roger are two hundred and seventy armed men. They are to surprise a walled and fortified city, manned by skilful Saracens. It is done, and within a year a Gothic Saracenic chapel looks out over the straits.

No sooner did the Normans conquer Sicily, than an architectural mania seized them: they built churches, castles, bridges and towers without end. As they came from the mainland a

mere handful of men, never at any time numbering an army except with aid of mercenaries, and wholly without artificers and engineers, they gladly availed themselves of the facile-handed Saracens, who accept fate, and their new masters, as best they can. Hence the strange medley of Saracenic-Gothic architecture one sees constantly in Sicily. Saracenic in all, but Gothic uses; the outline Moorish, the interior Christian.

Now I am driving on a well-kept road, free from the obstructive suburbs. The scent of nespole and mimosa is in the air; and palmettos and cacti, prickly pears, and aloes, breaking out everywhere. A hill covered with prickly pear and cactus, thick enough and tall enough to conceal and overshadow houses, is a weird sight; the bristly, water-padded leaves and twisted branches flinging themselves about, as if in agony.

Village succeeds village along the yellow strand; always of stone, a little architectural and Barocco, and with balconied windows, however low and small. One village is called "Paradise," another "Peace."

In Paradise a mother is beating a half-naked child, and a ragged boy, sitting beside a goat, tethered on a bank of grass, is sobbing bitterly.

The squalid walls of Peace resound to a dog-fight, extemporized within a ruined hovel. Some kind of canine *melée* is going on, too, outside; two white mastiffs against three terriers, tearing at each other's throats.

The only happy people are the fishermen, as brown and sepia-coloured as their boats, drawn up high and dry upon the strand, under tents of fishing-nets stretched out to dry.

To-day it is blowing too hard to venture out. A warm, moist sirocco has churned up the straits into a kind of fury; huge rollers break upon the beach, and, breaking, boom like a cannon among the rocks.

Oh that I could paint the colours of the shadows and the wild sea mist! One moment land and water all veiled, the next, a flood of white light calling up every detail into fields of brightness; a point of red rock, the mossy greenness of a mountain-side, the foaming trough of a blue wave, a glistening sail, the point of a cape, or a wall, mapped out for an instant, then gone for ever—all to the accompaniment of the cheery tinkling of the little horse's bells, his pattering hoofs marking a sympathetic rhythm.

As I advance nearer the point of Faro, the bowery heights, under which I have hitherto

driven, shade off into low, sandy hillocks, running out sea-ward towards Cape Pelorus. By-and-bye the lighthouse at Faro and the straits themselves suddenly vanish, and give place to a succession of ugly salt lakes (Platani) through which runs a high causeway.

The sirocco blows fiercer than before; the clouds gather darker; the sun grows pale. The crown of the day is past; its glories are faded. My spirits sink with the sunlight.

The little horse, too, feels the evil influence. His head droops. He slackens his pace. Alas! He trips! Oh! how the driver lashes him, and what Sicilian oaths he launches at him! How his little legs break into a wild gallop to make up for his fault, and how we tear along on the dangerous causeway!

At the village of Faro, a collection of dirty hovels half-buried in sand-hills, I am invited by the driver to descend. The brave little horse is fairly winded. His sides are dripping, and he is panting for bare life. A generous little beast, he needs no lashing of sharp whips to make him do his best.

"I always do my best," says his keen, obedient eye, turned reproachfully on his driver. "Will no one understand me?" (The driver

is making a new thong to his whip, with which to punish him.)

If the little horse could understand me, I would explain to him that we are all victims of an adverse fate, four-footed creatures and otherwise.

It seems to me, I also have been cruelly beaten in my time, when I did not deserve it.

My heart bleeds for you, unhappy little horse, but I cannot aid you, nor can I even remonstrate. Sicilian drivers are very brutal. I am alone, and perhaps the new thong might be tried on my back instead of yours; so I say nothing!

CHAPTER VIII.

Scylla and Charybdis.—Legend *versus* Reality.—The Strong Current.—Hannibal and his Pilot.—Orion's Temple.—Hercules crosses from Rhegium. — Dædalus. — Ulysses and Æneas Pass.

AM standing due east, on the sandy point of a sandy shore, under the Tower of Faro — a machicolated round tower and lighthouse above; a fortress below. From Messina, Faro appears rising from the waves; here I find it upon a long, low bank, stretching out into the middle of the straits.

On the opposite shore I see the rock of Scylla, two miles across, backed by the bare face of tawny Calabrian mountains. Homer says the rock of Scylla is "a peak of boundless height, ever hidden in dense clouds, the smooth, polished sides inaccessible to man." "High up, beyond flight of arrow, opens the awful cave, out of which Scylla, with six hideous

heads, barks from six dire mouths with triple rows of teeth; serpent-necked; ready to seize six sailors at a gulp." That Scylla is such a monster is the work of spiteful Circe.

Now, in reality, Scylla is a low, dark cliff, overhanging the sea, crowned by a mediæval castle, a gay little town clustering round its base, and giving a title to Prince Scilla of Naples; and a winding road, quite friendly and natural, leads up to it from the beach.

The famous caves—for there are many—are low down on the face of the rock. I can see the dark apertures, like hollow galleries, level with the waves, into which they thunder with terrific howls.

Beyond, on a beautiful sea-line, marked by white breakers, come town after town, fitfully revealed in the sirocco mist—Bagnara, Seminara, Palmi, Gioia, with its spacious gulf; and Nicotera, bathing on the water's edge; until all melt into sea and cloud at the extremity of Cape Vaticano.

Between Cape Vaticano and Cape Pelorus (Faro), at the opening of the straits, I ought to see the outline of the Lipari Islands, and the volcano of Stromboli, but I do not.

Already, at my back, I hear the implacable roar of Charybdis, circling round upon low

sunken reefs. At the sandy edge of the "Platani" I can see the vortex of the blue water, and the white spray flung upwards, as of a baffled element turned to bay.

"Three times a day Charybdis swallows up the dark billows, and three times spouts them out," says Virgil, in the "Æneid." Once within the sea-nymph's grasp, not Neptune himself could save a vessel!

To the undecked triremes of the Greeks, Locrians, and Rhegians, Charybdis must have been a most real danger. "Even a seventy-four-gun ship," says Admiral Smith, "may be whirled round in its vortex." "Better is it" (I am again quoting "Virgil"), "with delay, to coast round the extremities of Sicilian Pachynus (Cape Passaro, under Etna), than once to behold the misshapen Scylla and the green sea-dogs of Charybdis!"

The real secret of these classic horrors is the extraordinary force of the many contrary currents running through the straits. It causes one of the most violent whirlpools in the world.

The colours of the ocean, as I stand on Faro, are marvellous. Blue of every tint, from cobalt to azure, running into reds and browns, buff, cream, and yellow—sheets of foam, curained by the wind, great fields of whiteness,

ridges of sea-green walls, bright patches, mirror-like reflecting scurrying clouds!

A Norwegian barque comes riding on, every sail set to the wind. A pilot puts off from Faro to steer her down the straits, just as the pilot in Homer put off to bring Ulysses in, or the unlucky Pelorus, to guide Hannibal's fleet towards Africa. Do you know the tale?

Scipio's successes in Africa calling Hannibal home, he found himself carried out of his sea-track to the entrance of these straits. Seeing the double line of mountains melting together before him, he became alarmed.

"Where am I?" he asked the pilot (Hannibal is smarting under the loss of some of his veteran troops, and is in no humour to be trifled with). "Where is the passage? What is the name of those mountains rising before me?"

The pilot answers, "The mountains are in the island of Sicania."

This does not satisfy Hannibal.

"Is it a lake? Am I land-locked—betrayed—sold to Rome?"

Before the pilot can explain, he is beheaded. Then, as the vessel sails on, the mountains divide themselves right and left, the straits are visible, and all is clear.

Hannibal did not understand the western

formation of Sicily, nor its nearness to the mainland. The passage of troops between Africa and Italy, and the great naval battles, were all on the eastern and southern side. The Straits of Pelorus had an evil name, as haunted by savage Nereids, roaring sea-dogs, and strife of Poseidon's stormy brood. Nothing would tempt the ancients (always timid sailors) to take that course. Not only the Carthaginian fleets, during the Punic wars, avoided this passage, but even the Romans, when they came to conquer Sicily, never trusted themselves there. Except Messina and Naxos, no Greek cities lay within their narrow limits; nor did these, in importance, compare to Syracuse, Catania, or Acragas.

As I gaze, the lighthouse of Faro fades out, and in its stead a stately temple rises* on a palmetto-covered steep, well dyked with solid walls. A place half sea, half land, where mariners may land and offer sacrifice to Neptune.

The peristyle and portico stand on a lofty stylobate, the cella is rich within, and long lines of granite pillars rise to meet the skies. Earth never bore a nobler pile nor one more suited to a god.

* Hesiod and Diodorus mention a temple at Faro dedicated by Orion to Neptune.

Between sea and sky it stands, firm on a narrow neck of sand, yet poised, as it were, on waves.

Vainly does Thetis dash and fling her strong arms around it; and Boreas with white wings and streaming hair rage and roar, bringing inclement blasts from the hyperborean north; and Æolus, king of storms and winds, howl and menace around its lines; for within, upraised on a crystal altar, begirt with smooth-necked shells, sea-weed, and coral, sits the god, looking out eastward towards the morning sun.

Around the temple stretch the wide dykes strong as the walls. No human hands gathered the stones that formed them, nor fashioned the links that bind them together so firmly. We must scale the skies to find the architect. It is Neptune's son, the shaggy giant, the wondrous hunter—Orion.

Next to Orion, in the mystic procession of the past, comes Hercules; he swims across the straits from Rhegium, holding on by the horn of his strongest ox, and lands under Orion's temple.

There, as he takes his repose, Charybdis, a Sicilian sea-nymph who haunts with Fauns, Centaurs, and Satyrs, in the reedy marshes near the salt lakes, dashes down, and, aided by her friends, steals one of the sacred steers.

For this crime Jupiter changes her into a rock, doomed ever to watch the rising of the tide as she watched Hercules. As a rock she howls and cries, lamenting her hard fate. The waves wash over her from ebb to flow.

Dædalus comes next, a cunning engineer flying from Crete, with a second pair of wings, like those he gave to his son Icarus. Taking a humbler course nearer the earth, Apollo's wrath was not kindled against him, and he arrives safely on Cape Pelorus, from whence he wings his way to Eryx.

From the Ægean Sea, Minos, the Cretan King, the shadowy judge of souls, arrives at Faro in hot pursuit of Dædalus. The Phenicians, we know, had mercantile relations with the Sikels.

Vague, all this, and shadowy, as the passing sea-mist sweeping over waves, outlines of pale, nascent forms that glide by first in the dim procession I am tracing through all time.

With Ulysses as a navigator, I feel on a certain base of solid history. It is so easy to call his venerable figure up and trace his wanderings on the modern map.

Homer makes the most of Ulysses' perils in the straits, getting two adventures out of them, much in defiance of geography. But neither

Homer nor his audience knew much of the three-cornered Trinacria but as a vague legend.

Ulysses, towards the end of his career, enters the straits at Faro; the first time unscathed, with his full ship's company, thanks to the enchantress Circe.

She sitting in Colchis, wrapped in her many-coloured robe, an Eastern turban on her head, and dogs and swine around her, metamorphized from men, instructs him. Ulysses is neither to give ear to the Syrens' singing on the Salernian Seas, nor fall into Scylla's jaws, nor be ingulfed by whirling Charybdis.

Ulysses does not even see Scylla, her head is wrapped in clouds, Charybdis is silent, and all goes well.

Not so the second time.

Then as a waif he tosses through the straits, bound to a drifting raft, sucked down by the spiteful Nereid, and only escapes death by clinging, bat-like, to the branches of a wild fig-tree, until the reflux of the waters disgorges the raft, and he drops deftly into it.

(It is worthy of remark, that Admiral Smith, in speaking of Charybdis, verifies the truth of this myth in his account of the tide, which runs six hours each way in the straits, an interval of

from fifty to sixty minutes occurring between the changes.)

So Ulysses floats on his raft to an unknown island where Calypso harbours him. Others say he floated to Mylæ (Milazzo), and to this day they show you a hole in a granite rock, and tell you that Ulysses dug it out.

From Ulysses to Æneas is an easy stride. Æneas passes Cape Pelorus and Father Anchises with him. But he tarries not. Æneas is bound to the mythologic coast beyond Aci, where the Cyclops dwell, and thence to the Eastern shores at Eryx, where he is to found a temple in honour of his mother Venus.

CHAPTER IX.

The Normans.—How they Spread.—Raymond at Aversa.—Bras de Fer and General George Maniace.—Robert Guiscard, the Great Count.—"Take All You See."—Roger beholds Messina across the Strait.—Messina's Won.

IF all the romance of Cervantes and Ariosto, the daring of Cortez, the Black Prince, and Napoleon, the courage of young David, the endurance of Xenophon, the parsimony of Crassus, the appropriating appetites of Verres, and the wisdom of Cato, were fused into a whole, the result would be the Norman knight as we behold him about the year of grace 1040.

At Faro, he stares me in the face wherever I turn. The Norman is as much a part and parcel of Cape Pelorus, as Orion or Hercules.

The name of Norman is first heard of in Southern Italy about the year 1003.

A certain hesitation and dimness clouds the precise reason of their first appearance. Some

landed on their way home from pilgrimages or in the fulfilment of a vow to the Holy Shrine. Later occurred the Crusades. They came by twos and threes, now here, now there, mere individuals; only recalled to memory afterwards as the pioneers of that amazing band destined to achieve such conquests.

The first solid basis the Normans attain in Italy is when the Prince of Capua confers on them the township of Aversa, now a railway station on the Neapolitan line. Aversa, built by the Normans, is their starting-point in Southern Italy. To this gift the Prince of Capua was induced by self-interest or generosity to add a good slice of his newly-acquired territory of Monte Cassino, which the swords of the Normans had valiantly helped him to win.

The Duke of Naples not to be outdone by his neighbour prince, went further, and gave his daughter in marriage to the Norman leader Raymond, creating him titular "Count of Aversa."

No sooner did this great news reach the north than scores of needy Northmen made their appearance, intending "to wed daughters of kings."

At Aversa the Normans live a free, marauding life—the life of soldiers acknowledging

only military rule. There were two bands, or regiments, in Aversa—the *Veterans*, who had themselves come from Normandy, and the *Young Men*, ready to tempt fortune on every battle-field.

Thus the Normans continue for nearly twenty years comparatively unknown, until the second regiment of *Young Men* elect for their leader William, son of Tancred de Hauteville.

It was to this William, surnamed "Bras de Fer," General George Maniace, commanding for the Emperor of Constantinople in Southern Italy, addresses himself to join in his expedition against the Saracens in Sicily, the terms to be half the booty and half the towns. (Mark the entrance of General George upon the historic scene! Although generally unknown I shall have much to say of him before I end.)

The offer is accepted.

Seeing that the young de Hautevilles had not won for themselves as yet a separate kingdom, nor married a Lombard Princess, as such handsome youths naturally expected to do, after the example of Raymond, how can they do better?

No portent, comet, or meteor is recorded as marking the birth of the De Hautevilles—yet neither the Scipios, the Camilli, nor the African

race of Barca came into the world more perfect warriors.

At home, they passed their boyhood in sailing within the bounds of that barren coast under Coutance and St. Michael's Mount, in hunting, and in tilting. The Christianity of monks formed their creed; the code of camps, their morals.

What induced these warlike lads to select Italy as their apprentice-ground, no record tells.

The three eldest sons of Tancred—Humphrey, William, and Drogo—were already fighting in Puglia when William accepted General George Maniace's offer.

Bravest among the brave, courteous, sagacious, flanked on the battle-field by his two valiant brothers (counts also and captains riding beside him) who can resist William, Bras de Fer?

General George is successful in his Sicilian expedition, but General George, like many others, ignores the means which made him so. No booty is awarded to the youthful Normans, nor is a single Sicilian town placed in their hands.

William and his brothers retire to Italy, silent, but indignant. Like wise young men they bide their time, and that time comes speedily.

More de Hautevilles come riding through Europe from Normandy—younger sons of Tancred by his second wife, Fredigonda; Robert, *surnamed Guiscard*, the Cunning, and *Roger*, "*the Great Count.*"

Robert Guiscard, with a mere handful of men, spared to him from Melfi by Brother Drogo, gravely sets about conquering the kingdom of the two Calabrias. He cuts down timber, chestnut and oak, from the forest of La Stela, in the Calabrian mountains over Scylla, and erects a rough hill-fort opposite the sea, which he christens *Rocca San Martino.*

Robert tells the young knights, his followers, "To take all they see."

Daring leader and crafty statesman as he came to be, Robert is an ingrained robber.

He steals cattle, sacks towns, and captures rich proprietors for ransom in the most approved style of brigandage.

What else can a young De Hauteville do, alone in Calabria?

The last of the twelve sons of Tancred de Hauteville is Roger. He arrives in Italy about A.D. 1056, just twenty-three years after his elder brother William.

Happy for Roger that the Norman rule is already established. He could never be a

robber, like the rest. Tall and broad-shouldered, and powerful as a young David, his long flaxen curls hang down upon his Damascene corselet, and a beaming pair of eyes look out from under the brim of his circular helmet, worn low on the neck, and shaded by a plume of crimson feathers.

With an easy stride he mounts his war-horse, of which nothing is seen but the head and neck for the encasing armour, his glittering battle-axe lies beside the saddle-bow, his lance is in his hand; altogether a splendid youth, a very Lohengrin, or God-born knight.

No De Hauteville can compare with Roger. Easy of access, eloquent in speech, facile, gay, ambitious, as is the fashion of his house, greedy of victory, and turbulent for action, liberal, humane, without Robert's sordid vices, Roger the Great Count, as he came to be called, stands out a grand figure in the procession at Faro, challenging even Hercules himself.

How Roger came here was in this wise.

No sooner had he reached the city of Melfi, than, like brother Robert before him, he was sent down to fight in Calabria with seventy other knights. These De Hauteville brethren can no more rest side by side than young lions in the

same den. Each must have a kingdom to stretch himself in; if he does not find it ready made he must conquer it for himself.

Roger's orders are:—to complete Robert Guiscard's conquests in the south, to annihilate all enemies, be they Byzantine or Saracen, to plant the Norman flag on every peak and tower, and to encamp upon the capes and promontories of the shore.

Capo delle Armi, between Cape Spartivento and Reggio, is Roger's goal.

Hither he drives his knights before him, much in the same fashion as Hercules drove the cattle of Geryon. The Norman flag waves from the nearest height.

Before his young eyes expands that sun-lit gulf towards Catania, just as I saw it in the early morning. His outstretched hand seems to touch the fair Sicilian shore and Etna's snowy dome, glorious in changing hues. Those long lines of serried mountains, and those entrancing little bays and smiling capes, wave him a welcome!

Nothing but the straits—a span, a ditch—between Roger and a new kingdom; and he just arrived from pale, dull Normandy, with mists and clouds, damp woods, and barren downs, and all the economies of his father's

house and narrow shifts of country life, full in his memory.

Conceive the turmoil of his ardent soul, gazing upon the island of the gods!

Then came that tempting offer from treacherous Messina. Across the straits, three men sail secretly to meet Roger at Reggio, while the luxurious Saracens, their masters, suspecting nothing of, and caring less for, Norman Roberts and Rogers, if they can but enjoy their parks and gardens, streams and flowers, singing-birds, dancing-girls, and sultanas—are shut up in their harems, keeping the feast of Ramazan.

"If Roger will only come," the three men say, "Messina shall be his."

Could any young hero, thirsting for conquest, desire more?

That Roger did not dash across the straits, and charge into Messina then and there, without waiting for brother Robert, now Duke of Apulia and Calabria, says much for his loyalty and prudence.

With that enchanting city opposite, dallying in the sunshine, how he longed to attempt the enterprise!

The months of March and April pass by expecting Robert, busy with Pope and Kaiser,

and great designs of a southern empire, to bind the West and Byzantium together.

Meanwhile, the Saracens at Messina, seeing that the Normans tarry so long at Reggio, grow suspicious, collect their ships, and anchor off the coast to observe the strangers.

Little by little it seems to Roger's ardent soul that the prize is slipping from his grasp. He will seize it while he may; alone, without waiting for Robert.

He chooses a little band from among the knights who are with him at Reggio, leaves the remainder and the small fleet under the care of his brother Godfrey, and rides down the coast to Scylla.

He arrives at break of day; the weather is fair, the passage smooth; neither of the spiteful nymphs Scylla nor Charybdis stirring; the fishermen's boats still drawn up high and dry upon the sand, under the jutting rock bearing the mediæval castle. These boats he seizes, and embarks with his followers. There is no room for the horses, so they drag them after them by the bridle, through the waves.

Midway across, Roger hears the cocks crow on Faro, and his heart is light, for the cock-crow is the omen of possession!

Silently he lands on this long Faro point, where the lighthouse stands, he and his men and horses. The first streaks of daylight are low upon the horizon, the rosy tints of morning touch the waves, harbingers of a new day—a day of victory.

Who can paint Roger's joy? He dare not speak, neither he nor his companions. Saracens may be abroad, hear them, see them, and surprise them!

Under the cover of those sandy hills that overhang the shore, and with the deep shadow of Monti Dennamare and Scuderi upon them, their feet upon leaves and seaweed to deaden all sound, they saddle their horses, and ride forth upon the flowing river to Messina.

He is safe! Robert may win the world, form empires in the East and West, sack Rome, browbeat France, invade his Norman cousins in England—what matter?

Roger asks no other portion than Sicily!

Messina surprised, submits without a struggle, as is her wont.

The Saracens, struck with a sudden panic, fly; some to their galleys in the sickle harbour; others to the heights behind the city; or along the shore; into the forests;

on the mountain-tops — anywhere, from the Normans!

Like a young god, Roger has come and conquered. The keys of Messina are sent to Robert, and he is invited to come across and take possession; which he does.

CHAPTER X.

How they live in Messina. — The Cathedral. — Bullying a Priest. — Packed for the Next World. — The Virgin's Letter.

THE earthquakes have left nothing standing in Messina but the cathedral. How this has escaped is marvellous. There are no ancient palaces, nor churches, nor monuments. A long list of names looks imposing in a guide book, but "there is nothing in it," as Lord Dundreary says. All the churches seem to have risen simultaneously, like Aladdin's palace, in one night, and that night, the dreariest and most commonplace period of architecture.

The gods have done their best for Messina. No city can appropriate everything. As long as mountain and sea, sun and sky hold together, she will be absolutely beautiful. There is an atmosphere of loveliness one can recognize in a city, as in a woman. Messina has it. She is affable, too, and civilized beyond any

other spot in the island. Her commerce and her shipping make her cosmopolitan.

Messina has no amor patriæ. She does not hate, and rob, kidnap and stab foreigners, who would spend their wealth within her walls. On the contrary, she caresses and encourages them. Very different in this to Palermo, where mercantile settlers are certain to be driven out by terror.

This is amor patria! Sicily for the Sicilians; on the same principle as "Ireland for the Irish," both starving, and both too idle or too proud to work.

"Amor patria," leads Sicily to many strange deeds, best omitted. The Mafia, for instance, and ransoms for human life. At Messina there is no Mafia. It is contrary to the genius of the place. Public security is on a par with any Northern Italian city.

The Messinese are courteous and friendly. "God be with you," is the popular salutation. You see no beetle-browed threatening villains, picturesque in stinking rags; brigands in all but the power to rob and murder. The beggars are noisy and numerous, but they neither clutch you by the shoulder nor bar your road savagely.

Here I can choose my fiacre without fear,

and make my bargain with a "*safe*" driver, who will not select the loneliest part of the road, to extort more money—with a pair of ferocious eyes, roaming round in search of possible accomplices.

Seeing what Messina is, I cannot account for the absence of any decent hotels. "The Vittoria" is dark, uncomfortable, and noisy; a real caravanserai. Come to-day, gone to-morrow, is written on the face of everything. You cannot stay there.

Not even the bronzed-face master who sits solemnly, fur cap on head, in a dark den, and doles out to you your bill, as if he were a wizard, and the bill your fate—expects it. There is no other hotel; lodgings they tell me are impossible except to yearly tenants; so, short of a yacht or a balloon, you cannot stay at Messina.

One comes at the antiquity of the cathedral begun by Count Roger, and completed by his son King Roger, 1298—by observing the alternate courses of red and white marble, and the pointed style of architecture which recalls Pisa. There are three pointed doors, which, says Dennis, show the influence of the later Anjouvine dynasty; also the flat wall carvings.

The central arch is very lofty, and finely

worked in elongated spirals, mounting to an upper string course of trefoil arches, each arch enclosing a female head. The three doors are really a fine study of mediæval work, distinctly Norman, and Gothic in character, a very striking combination when seen for the first time.

Observe, however, that these remarks apply only to the lower half of the façade. The hideous moderness of the upper portion is not to be described. The two towers in the rear introduce me to Sicilian coloured tiles, blue, yellow, red and purple—small and trefoil-shaped, placed thickly upon each other in pattern. The glare and blaze of these coloured tiles, the whitewash on the walls, the lack of any little softening veil of moss or lichen (those harmonizers of the North, rarely found in these latitudes) is distressing to the eyes.

Inside, one forgets the dirt and the whitewash in the splendour of the coup-d'œil. How welcome is the gloom of those twenty-six, deep-brown granite columns, brought, it is said, from Orion's temple at Faro. You must accept them and their gilt bases as you must accept Orion himself, in all faith. The roof is very noble, full of gold and colour; the gigantic rafters dating back to the time of Saracenic Manfred and the Hohenstaufens.

Here my admiration ends.

Later, I find myself anathematising the flaunting frescoes and the obtrusive plaster. The dirt is really offensive, so is the irreverence.

The facchini, that plague of Sicily, attack you; the beggars dog your steps with want and hunger in their eyes. Everybody is familiar, even the priest who is saying mass in a conversational way at the altar. This Sicilian *laissez-aller* has its good and bad side. In the cathedral it is at its worst.

Two men are screaming on the steps of a side-altar where the service has just ended, the incense fumes still hanging about it. How these two men do not come to blows I cannot understand. One is a cowed-looking, pinched-up, old priest, the other a stout young citizen, livid in the face.

What the old priest has done, or why the young citizen should swear at him and shake his fist in his face, I cannot explain, as I am ignorant of the Sicilian dialect.

At length a climax is reached. The young man raises his arm as if to strike the old priest prostrate on the floor!

Nothing of the kind! The old fellow limps away without answering a word.

No one interferes, no one looks on. I con-

clude, therefore, that such scenes are common. I admire the swing, and abandon, and picturesque familiarity of the streets; I can forgive the chatty priests, with ribald eyes, lolling in street corners; I can pardon the beggars—but, in a church! license has limits!

I like the high altar, the central apse covered with bold Saracenic mosaics, like those I came to see at Cefalù and Monreale. (At Monreale the Saviour is an Arab and wears a dark blue turban.) The sides lined with red velvet trunks, let into niches; imperial coffins, ready packed, so to say, for the long last voyage.

Within his own red velvet trunk, ready for heaven or hell, lies Count Conrad, son of that philosophic and intellectual pagan, Frederic II.; Alfonso the Magnificent, King of Naples and Sicily, of the Norman line, and a royal lady, also lend themselves to be so briefly dealt with as to lie buried in a box. The lady's name is Antonia of Arragon. Here they all rest, as passengers in a free berth, on a smooth sea!

Under them sit the purple-robed canons, within the richly-carved stalls of the choir, chanting matins, mass, and evensong. The archbishop blesses them, the fragrant incense embalms them.

Peace be to their bones !

It is very snug lying, after all, especially so near the Virgin's letter. For be it known, the Virgin Mary wrote a letter with her own hand to the citizens of Messina, and that letter is here at the back of the high altar framed in gilt and bronze. I beg pardon, a copy, I should say, for the original, unfortunately, is lost.

The copy is in Latin, translated by Constantine Lascaris, and mentions "that the Virgin takes Messina under her special protection." Dennis says a register is kept of the miraculous cures wrought by it, especially in "*driving out devils.*"

I feel the obligation of faith in Sicily. If I accept the personality of Ulysses and Orion, I cannot dispute the authenticity of the Virgin's letter ; only, it appears to me, if the Virgin had disposed herself to write at all she would not have expressed herself in mere scholastic phrases, with such an odour of dog-Latin and the cloister.

As each Greek city in Sicily had its Mimes, or pagan drama, put into action, so each Christian city has its "Mystery," or Festival, only the Greeks had protecting Goddesses, and we, in modern times, have female Saints.

The Virgin is the patroness of Messina. On

the day of her assumption, the Festa-della-Barra, there are strange doings—giants, representing Zanchus and Rhea, as fabulous founders of Messina, are dragged through the streets, a huge stuffed camel fixed on a board, attended by a Saracen squire, symbolizing Roger's first entrance into Messina mounted on that animal; a gilded galley, commemorating a miraculous arrival of corn in a time of famine; and the Barra itself, representing the Virgin's tomb, surrounded by the twelve apostles (aged from twelve to five), a revolving circle of infant angels above, sun, moon, and cherubim revolving also; an azure globe floating in tinsel skies; and over all, the Almighty in a rich brocaded robe, carrying upon his arm the Virgin's soul, prefigured by a lovely child, in a white maille, figured in golden stars.

CHAPTER XI.

A Paradise of Flowers.—Campo Santo.—Tombs to Let and No Tenants.—Preparing the Dead.—Painted Carts.—A Substitute for School Boards.—What they Teach.

THE dreamy beauty of the "Flora" haunts me.

Wandering down the Corso I find myself suddenly overwhelmed by the perfume of pompadour cloves, mignonette, and nespole. Rose leaves floating about, and rose blossoms lighting up large parterres invite me to enter a tall iron gateway, and I find myself within "The Flora."

What a delicious name for a garden. And what delicious roses! Waxy, firm, and full of colour, roses evidently proud of themselves as having survived the waste of storm and autumn.

The timber, to put it finely, is various. Light foliaged pepper trees, the jagged leaves as if cut out by a stamp; magnolias, with here

and there a luscious flower left sleeping on the bough; broad, woolly-leaved paulonias; tassel-headed thickets of bamboo, sixty feet high, rustling with pensive moans, as if invoking kindred streams; the india-rubber plant, the finest glazed foliage in the world; arbutus, seringa, and fernandia, every member of the distorted race of cacti, casting abroad bristling members as against invisible assailants; the whole aloe tribe, variegated and plain; yuccas and echeverias, a family group in which deformity is hereditary—indeed, the aspect of these fleshy plants is so various, and they partake so much of a tortured individuality, that to me they appear positively human.

After these come the palm genus, with those magnificent fronds formed to wave on battle fields as symbols of victory. Yet after all, if you come to look into the matter calmly as I did, standing in the warm sunshine, the palm divested of the extraordinary dignity of its foliage, is nothing but a magnified pineapple!

Palmettos and dwarf fan-palms assert themselves as stiff as the pattern on a Japanese vase; euphorbias, gay with scarlet tassels; hibiscus, glowing with sanguine flowers; mimosa, a floral sea-weed, one mass of yellowness and sweetness; pomegranates, and carobias, and

Judas-trees so glorious in the spring. Banks of mesembryanthemums, pink and yellow, and ivy, run round beds of scarlet geraniums, and blue mimulus, and carnations and tree jessamines still linger as though unwilling to depart while other flowers hold their own.

The tuberoses are very valorous, and open their snowy bosoms to the December breeze, and a lovely wistaria, forgetting it is winter, tosses forth purple ringlets.

A little lake is tufted with papyrus and lilies, flag flowers and reeds. In a moist corner I see that exquisite freak of nature, a tree-fern. Then I seat myself upon a marble bench, to note the ripening dates yellowing in the sun.

A French horn sounds from the open window of a white-washed barn, presenting itself as a *palace* in the surrounding piazza.

The long-drawn notes come to me as the articulate voice of the rich nature around. I can see the purple mountains rising over the house-tops in a golden haze to which sapphires are pale!

Since the time of Proserpine Sicily has been the home of flowers. We are told that the virgin goddesses, Proserpine, Minerva, and Diana, weaved with their own hands a variegated flower garment for Father Jupiter. "A

mythological 'coat of many colours' like Hebrew Joseph's."

No wonder the gods loved Sicily!

I have had enough of "*Messina l'Allegra*," and its hundred thousand inhabitants disporting themselves in the noise and glare of the Marina. I cannot get away from Figaro nor from Count Almaviva, always meeting Rosina carrying a *billet-doux!* (by chance, of course), and twirling fans at street corners; Don Bartolos, fat and imbecile, leering at youthful beauty out of cafés and trattorie; Don Basilios, by scores, smoking and guzzling; and aged Don Marcellinas, remembering the days of their youth, leaning out over balconies, with knitted shawls upon their heads.

The Teuton may do his best to plant himself in hotels as Baron or Count, but generally as *commis voyageur*, the element is Spanish, Spanish to the backbone.

It is good that this often destroyed city should have some character of its own.

To-day I drive out through a long suburb, degrading in filth, mud, and squalor.

The moment you leave the streets you plunge into the depths of the most hideous poverty—hovels, green with mouldiness, falling walls, villas in ruins, and a population stolid

and brutish. At the distance of a mile I leave this wretched humanity behind, and mount to a modern Grecian temple, grandly conspicuous on a natural platform.

This is the Campo Santo, smiling through colonnades of marble pillars over the blue straits. There is Reggio opposite; every house-roof twinkling to the sun; laughing little villages dotting the shore; bays, capes, and promontories, dark forests on the Calabrian heights, and, above all, the stern outlines of Aspromonte. Such a scene as this should rob death of its terrors!

How wondrous is the beauty of this earth when we know where to seek it!

A custode tormented me for pence; he deeply regretted the healthiness of Messina.

"Alas! Signora," he said, as he led me up flight after flight of magnificently balustraded marble stairs, "the Campo Santo will never be finished if things go on like this. Imagine, to yourself, my wages never paid, and but a quarter of the best vaults sold! *Che vuo le?* With such a debt it is a *desperazione!* This Campo Santo is much too grand and too large for such a city as Messina. If it were Naples now, or Rome, *alla buonora!* There are fevers *there.*

"But *here*, Chè, nothing! Municipalities like to have their names published, as beginning national monuments; but they do not finish them. Ah, dear Signora! believe me, a great many people must die to make up the debt; die quietly in their beds.

"A pestilence like the cholera does us more harm than good. We throw the dead into holes, rich and poor alike, and seal them up and leave them. Nobody makes a monument for cholera, or buys a vault."

Here the custode cast his eyes around at the nobly-terraced gardens and funereal groves, clothing the "walks of state," at the rear of the temple.

"They forgot what a healthy place Messina is, when they started this Campo Santo," he added reflectively.

He showed me the apertures for the burial of the poor (one opened every day at sunset, then sealed up for a year, with a stone, as at Naples), within an open, pillared court, in the interior of the building. The contempt the custode felt for the *poor* dead, was undisguised. Afterwards he led me to an enclosed space, covered with graves bristling with little black crosses.

"Here, Signora," said he, pointing to the

graves, "we *prepare* the bodies for one year of the rich, those who can pay for it; then we place them in the vaults within the temple." (A Greek notion this, Christianized into something filthy !)

I have mentioned the painted carts. They are passing me every instant. "*Give in the eye*," as the Italians say, everywhere, not only in crowded thoroughfares, but under the shadow of Doric temples, in the black lava country, among marshy lakes, and upon lonely mountain sides.

The painted carts bear the riches of the land; sulphur, fruit, oil, wine, wheat, meadow-hay, and saffron. If I were asked, I should say they were an Arab invention.

They are mounted on high wheels, and the spokes and panels are so carved and ornamented, one wonders in so poor a country, how the money is forthcoming. A first-class cart costs from £100 to £120 sterling. There are various degrees of merit in the build and the decoration, to say nothing of the harness. A rich farmer's cart flashes along the roads, bright as an eastern tent in action. The red velvet housings of the harness is a splendour! the vast pyramids of tinkling bells, a wonder! I will venture to say there is not a cart in all

Sicily, however old and shabby, that is not painted. A bare cart is an indecency!

An incalculable advantage too, attends these carts. Without books, they teach all history. History read in reds and blues, and yellow ochre, crude, it is true, and positive, but effective, and not without a certain "go" and spirit of its own.

No need for school-boards and village dames in Sicily. You have only to study a series of painted carts, to know everything. And so tolerant too! On the same cart your eyes glance from a Holy Family in front, to Hercules and Alexander hob-nobbing on the sides; Napoleon at Sedan jogs in company with Bismarck at the back, and Amorini and Cherubs circle round irrespective of politics.

Tasso's Rinaldo is a great card. I saw him yesterday seated in a boat in green armour, contemplating a shore furnished with an obligato of reeds and shells, on which stands Armida, dishevelled, and naked to the waist, surrounded by nymphs. One figure is veiled—this is the modest, though war-like, Clorinda.

"*Flight of Rinaldo*" (I noticed this cart later, but put it here for sequence). Rinaldo with a parrot nose, blank-faced, his hand upon his hip, staring at vacancy.

"What shall Rinaldo do?" asks the Text. I forgot to say, you are aided by a printed Text—stage instructions as it were—in capital letters.

"Leave the wicked, but enamoured Armida to her fate?" No, says the Text, with general good feeling, "His sensibility forbids it! His sensibility! His passion!" (Text continues): "Yet duty and religion urge him on. He must go." Rinaldo still wearing green armour listens to "Religion and Duty," and departs. His light bark divides the cobalt waves. His eyes are riveted on Armida. Spite of her attractive knees and outstretched arms, the shore recedes, and, the Text informs us, "Calm returns to the bosom of the hero." Calm represented by a yellow dash on the green surface of his armour, near the heart.

This particular cart I saw close to the mysterious elephant, in the Piazza at Catania. The horse, a bay, was refreshing himself at the fountain, while the driver was lading it with mandarin oranges.

Rinaldo again (naughty boy), "Knows no duty, but to his lady-love Armida." (Text) His knees are bare (this in Sicilian carts is a sign of passion). Armida, in the violence of her feelings, streaked blue and red—wears a coronet.

Rinaldo is reposing on a leopard skin beside her. A tree with unknown fruit waves over his head; while a cupid snug on a leaden cloud draws his bow and grins.

"Where is Clorinda now?" sternly demands the Text; to which question Rinaldo pays no heed whatever.

Your Sicilian enjoys all history, sacred and profane, poetic, biographic, and anecdotal—this last as culled from Gallic memoirs; but a conspiracy recommends itself to the most ordinary intelligence.

A group of olive-skinned boys were crowding round a cart, drawn up on the Marina, one spelling out the Text to the rest, who seemed greatly to relish it. Cinq Mars on the large panel in front—(a dismal spectacle in Louis Treize costume, and perfectly idiotic. The artist in this is true to history—Cinq Mars was a superlative idiot), is in the act of stretching out his naked sword over a round table, Marion de l'Orme striking an attitude at his back. Other swords of other conspirators are crossing each other over his.

The Text exclaims, "Death to Richelieu."

The motto of "Death to anyone" pleases your Sicilian orderer of the cart, and chooser of the picture. "Death" is always a gain to some

one, he reasons. Cinq Mars may be obscure to him as a personage, but naked swords tell their own tale. "As many naked swords as possible and men to draw them," is the Sicilian order, answering to the "oranges" of Farmer Flamboro' in the "Vicar of Wakefield."

"Perillus, by command of Phalaris, Tyrant of Girgenti—burning within a brass bull, devised by himself," appears to appeal to the popular imagination. This was one of the first carts I noticed, on arriving at Messina. The bull, a very notable beast, rubbed on in blue, with a green cavity in his back, good for slipping in Perillus; naked slaves are stirring up the furnace with long poles, and Phalaris sits aloft, grinning complacently.

Then my recollection wanders off to a bran-new cart I saw afterwards at Palermo, in the "artist's" shop—Constantine, with an unmoved countenance, swimming in a yellow bath, unscrewing brass taps to let in more water; while a giant behind, in blue and pink, hits him a sounding blow on the head with a classic water-jug, whether with murderous intent, or from a want of perspective on the part of the "artist," the Text does not specify. At all events, this painting has its value. It instructs your native (already a proficient) in a new form of murder.

These Greek-shaped jars come handy. Water, in the country, is always carried in them. Some one will suffer for this. Look out, Mr. Questor! "Robbery with violence and death by a Greek jar!" This cart will not flash along the roads for nothing.

I see the "Prodigal Son" displaying himself often, up and down the roads, heavily laden with sulphur; he is in white pants, a blue coatee with tails, "frac," as the Italians call it, with a chimney-pot hat; one hand clasped in his father's (yellow), the other in his mother's (pink). A dog also present, full of human intelligence, and evidently anticipating the consequences of this sad history.

The next scene I remember on a cart at Taormina, waiting for Mr. Rainforth, who was drinking tea with me. The "Prodigal" has dwindled down into a small boy in blue, with a billycock hat; pigs, sheep, and goats, much taller than himself, group round him; behind is a pastoral expanse, with a volcano in the back-ground; a party of ladies and gentlemen on horseback—riding directly into the crater.

On another occasion, I met "the Prodigal" in green. He has returned; his hair is close cropped, and he is attired in a flowered dressing-

gown; his father in a wig, and his mother still in pink, not having changed her dress after so many years—receive him. Valises and trunks, such as a swineherd would require in travelling, pile up the back-ground.

CHAPTER XII.

From Messina to Taormina.—Beppo and Luigi.—Ruins! Ruins!—Scarletta Beggars.—Waiting for the Train.—Hellenic Foot-marks.—The Town of Ali.—Etna.—The Foundation of Naxos—Roman, Punic, and Norman-Saracenic Remains.—Naxos and the Tyrants.

THINKING of what I saw on the rail from Messina to Taormina, makes me sad! How can I describe perfect beauty? In man or woman it is difficult, how much more so in the larger, broader features of nature? I gazed on it with rapture, I think of it with pain. Once it has been given me to behold this enchanting land. Shall I ever return?

From the handsome railway station at Messina you shoot out, as it were, to sea, along shining sands fringing the straits. Such portions of the mountains as are visible (and that is but little, they rise so abruptly from the shore) are mantled in massive foliage; chestnuts and oaks above,

citrons, apricots, almonds, and knotted fig-trees below. There are vines trained on arched trellises, supported by colonnades; vines clambering wild among the rocks; country-houses, like coy nymphs, blushing out of scented woods (some, alas! in palpable ruin; others resplendent with bright frescoes; every gate and aperture a delight of flowers and flowering-shrubs), slopes of emerald grass dotted by fan-palms, fields of cacti, walls hanging over with slender veils of mimosa; here a tuft of snowy nespole, there a dark group of cypress; a grotto curtained with red-leaved creepers; limestone rocks and grey-tinted marble; fantastic bluffs and pinnacles, cropping out into marigolds and lupins; great water-courses (fiumari); pebbly wastes, leading to deep, smiling dells; cornfields carved out upon the heights; flax, saffron, and sainfoin on the plain, and olives everywhere.

Everything but level ground! Of that there is none; no level, except the belt of beautiful shore, the margin of the fiumari, and the course of the streams fading away among the hills.

As we advance, rounding capes and promontories, blue waves break against low rocks, then swarming upwards in sheets of curling foam, mark the outline of delicate little bays.

Here is the rare charm of a double coast-line; not pressed into one picture, as at Faro, but far enough asunder for each shore to display a character of its own. The Calabrian mountains are twelve or thirteen miles across, and the sparkling straits are widening every moment.

How lively is the channel with passing ships! A man-of-war, with royalty on board, all sails set for Taormina; flotillas of lateen-sailed smacks; Florio's steamers plying from town to town, and innumerable brown fishing-boats tossing in the waves.

And this Messinian shore is as peaceful as it is lovely. A fisherman population, as the rows of boats show, drawn up high and dry in the rounding bays. No fear of brigand or buccaneer here. Beppo or Luigi, with his Phrygian cap, who scrapes the fertile earth when the wind blows too fiercely to go to sea, is as harmless as our English Jacks or Bobs, ploughing the northern fields. The cactus-fruit he gathers at his door, the fish he takes when the rollers, thundering in at either end of the straits, kindly permit him—feed himself and his numerous family. Beppo or Luigi, who have a boat and a little corn-patch, a lemon-garden, or a vine-yard, are well-to-do; the rest are destitute.

Now we are passing beside a small town

nestling by the sea. In the distance it looks beautiful as an enchanted castle, but, on near approach, turns out to be nothing but a mass of unclean hovels in a confusion of ruined walls.

What a dismal tale of other days these towns and villages tell! Suburban luxury that has been, when Messina was the Neapolitan Viceroy's capital, and ruin that is, under United Italy!

At Scarletta, the first station from Messina, another castle, but in ruins, commands what was once the high road to Catania. (Heaven help those who travel on it now, the ruts are up to the axles of the painted carts.) A feudal fortress peeps out of a cypress wood, and the whole population seems to gyrate round it. The arrival of the train is the event of the day, the solitary chance of pocketing a stray coin. Many miserable faces flatten themselves against the wooden paling that encloses the platform; many beseeching children hold out dirty fingers, and the agitation of the drivers of broken-down fiacres is painful to behold. They spring up on their seats, scream, whistle, and crack their whips. In vain! No one gets out!

From the point of Faro to Catania, is the home of classic mythology; mythology, embodied and vivified in the burning tints of

southern life. Where stand those desolate half-ruined towns was the home of gods and heroes. Every river, headland, and sandy baylet had its legend, every cave and rock its myth, as sung by the native bards, Theocritus, Dafne, Stesichorus, and Empedocles.

Wherever the Greek set his foot, temples and statues to the gods blossomed out upon the shore. He lived in the open. Earth and sea were sacred to him, not a river or a stream but was the haunt of deity. The great volcano of Etna, the earthly seat of Jove, was as a new faith to him; its expression, a simple niche to Pan, set up in a grass field, a sculptured group of fauns in a village market-place, a frieze upon a rustic temple, or the chiselling of a new altar. The Greek gods were everywhere—and with the gods came poetry. Now poetry may haunt great cities, but here she was at home, the hem of her robe touched everything!

There is nothing of this symbolism on the northern coast where the Phenicians and Carthaginians colonized Sicily. Nothing at all like it except on that limited portion of the western shore from Eryx to Trapani (Drepanum), the second sickle-shaped harbour, rival of Messina. Eryx is seven miles distant from Trapani. A rocky cliff of yellow limestone, on

the level expanse of a pastoral plain is the legendary site of the temple of Aphrodite, founded by Æneas and strengthened by Dædalus (a personification of the erratic energy of the artist, flying from place to place, and creating everywhere). Below, by the sea, Æneas buried his father, Anchises. The very rock is pointed out where the "God-born" reposed on fresh, fair skins to witness the funeral games, and pour libations on the tomb.

From Trapani (Drepanum) Hellenic tradition leads on southward to the ruined temples of Mœgarian Selinus, to Segeste, with its dim legends of Æneas and Sicanian Alybus, which may mean Elymus, or a people said most persistently to be of Trojan origin, to Acragas (Girgenti), second only to Syracuse, Rhodian Gela, Camarina, and Helorus, and to "the city of cities" itself.

The station of Ali rises gleeful out of bowery woods of almond and peach. Its warm mineral springs were dedicated to Hercules by the careful nymphs who attended him on his journey through Sicily. Capo D'Ali and a Norman round tower jutting out to sea, mark the nominal entrance into the Pelorian Straits, opposite Capo delle Armi, the Leucopetia of the ancients on the mainland.

We pass the stations of Alessio and Letojanni — mountains, mountains, nothing but mountains, with fiumari rending them apart.

At Giardini I quit the rail for Taormina, six miles off, among the clouds. I leave Furiosa to fight with the facchini (I see her disappear like a limp rag, among horses, drivers, beggars, and general rapscallionism) and look round.

A bare little station, Giardini, in the curve of a well-marked bay, jammed in under walls of frowning cliffs, apparently inaccessible. The friendly hint, however, of a white road zig-zagging up to the right relieves my mind, balanced between the appalling aspect of the cliffs and the keen desire I have to scale them.

To the left the heights fall back, and the majestic form of Etna rises. The great giant comes upon me in his summer mood; snow-crowned, indeed, but green, subdued and gentle. Forests wreathe his flattened cone, and indenting lines of a circle of lesser craters sit like a crown of dusky jewels on his brow.

An enormous stretch of ascending country, broken in surface and lavä-streaked, rises from Giardini. The brilliant verdure mocks the blackness of the lava boulders tossed on the surface of inky streams, stiffened into black death as they flowed from the crater.

The sight of Etna is to me as a discord —death among life, the very mouth of Tartarus opening in Hesperian fields.

A sombre promontory juts out, forming one horn of the bay. This bay, so lovely in colour, for the rocks are deep red, the water intense blue, and this promontory—a green bank sloping to the sea, where stands a solitary house, half farm, half convent, with a belfry at one end —is very notable as the threshold of Grecian history in Sicily. It is the site of Naxos, the parent colony founded by Chalcydians and by Ionians from Bacchi Naxos, B.C. 735. Here they remained some years stationary, fearing to go further south on account of Etna.

It was in Grecian Naxos that Bacchus wooed forsaken Ariadne, sleeping on the rocks from weariness of grief at the loss of Theseus—so, at this second Naxos, Bacchus had his altar. But the great shrine was to Apollo Archagatas, and the original statue was extant as late as the time of Augustus, B.C. 36. If one could only know on what spot this altar stood! Or where the Greeks lept on shore! Did Apollo stand on the site of that lonely convent, about whch a few tormented olive-trees cluster? Or was he placed nearer the point of Cape Schiso? *Chi lo sa?*

As we moderns hoist a Union Jack, or a star-spangled banner, the Greeks (after the sanction of an oracle had been sought for and obtained) reared an altar upon which sacred fire burned, as a signal of possession.

In the mythic times an altar to Neptune rose on the point of Faro, and a shrine to Venus on the rock of Eryx; thus the god's blessing followed navigators across the seas, and the people prospered. There is a battered statue of San Pancrazio on a pedestal, close to the road at the station of Giardini, which was pointed out to me by at least a dozen urchins as "*una cosa di gran devozione.*"

Now does San Pancrazio mark the site of the ancient shrine of Apollo to which all mariners repaired to sacrifice and pour libations before leaving Sicily, as a *sacro-santo* spot, consecrated by the presence of their first ancestors?

With the foundation of this Greek colony begins the real history of Sicily; just as the history of the Norman Conquest begins the real history of England, or the Capetian race that of France.

No other invasion, conquest, or colony stands out with a like interest. The Greeks brought in polished manners, the knowledge of cultivation and trading, the splendour of archi-

tecture, the worship of the beautiful in art and nature, intellectual refinement, and the philosophy of the schools.

Rome has left little, considering the length of her rule, and that not of her best—mere journeyman-work, tinkering up Greek walls and monuments.

Indeed, what did Rome ever *create* anywhere?

The Punic remains in Sicily are but few and far between. I only know of some fragments on the site of Motya on the island of San Pantaleo, near Marsala, and two strange monumental statues of a man and woman, like huge fish with human heads, in the Museum of Palermo—Phenician, rather than Punic, and probably the oldest monumental sculptures in the world.

It was in destruction that Carthage left her mark, not in creation. Carthage wrought that mighty ruin at Selinus, turned Minervian Himera into a corn-field, and tore down the temples at Girgenti.

The Norman-Saracenic remains, however poetic and attractive, are but an expression of the bastard union of two styles, as widely different as the two nations which produced them.

Sicily is Greek, Doric Greek. Such we see it even in ruin, and in that grandest monument

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of architectural art, no ruin, but a complete and perfect structure as it stands, roofless, in which no stone is missing, no morsel of cement wanting—the great Temple of Segeste.

For two hundred years things went merrily at Naxos. So rich was the city, spreading out fan-like upon the lower spurs of Etna, that, if left at peace, it would have ended by colonizing all Sicily.

But a jealous Nemesis called up a tyrant of her own blood to smite her, in Hippocrates of Gela. Gela, now Terranuova, between Syracuse and Girgenti. Hippocrates, obviously provoked by the prosperous Ionian colonies of Catania and Leontini approaching him too nearly, smites not only Naxos but Zancle also.

The next foe who comes to Naxos is Hiero of Syracuse; Syracuse as a Dorian colony being always bitterly hostile to the Ionians wherever they are to be found. Hiero turns the Ionian Greeks out of Naxos with cruel slaughter, and sends them bodily to Leontini; the shrines of Apollo and Bacchus are stained with blood, and the shores left desolate until a band of Peloponnesian colonists appear. Not for long, however. At Hiero's death the Ionians are back again, and the streets of laughing Naxos are once more motley and crowded.

When Alcibiades is sailing about the straits between Messina and Rhegium to pick up allies for the great Athenian expedition against Syracuse, he anchors in the Bay of Naxos, and receives welcome and promise of aid from the Naxians. As Ionians they are thoroughly with the Athenians; who, they hope, may tear down detested Syracuse, and sow its site with salt.

But by so doing Naxos is unconsciously preparing her own doom.

Twelve years pass in peace and plenty after the failure of the Athenian expedition, but Dionysius, the bloody tyrant of Syracuse, is only biding his time.

Now he swoops down in revenge on Naxos, and without a blow the smiling white city by the Ionian Sea falls an easy prey about B.C. 403.

Those of the inhabitants he does not slay Dionysius sells as slaves. The buildings are swept away, and the site of Naxos given back to the native Siculians. They never returned. For twenty-two centuries no man has dwelt there.

CHAPTER XIII.

The Fortunes of Ducetius.—Palicia, an Infernal Lake.—Ducetius at Syracuse.—Shall He Live or Die?—The Beautiful Shore.—The Last of Ducetius.

AND whom did the stranger Greeks find when they landed in this Naxian bay?

On whose footsteps were they treading? The native Sicanians and the later Siculi, who were they?

This question will be best answered by telling the story of Ducetius, king or chief of the united tribes of Siculi and Sicani, who, like Garibaldi, absorbed all discordant nationalities into a whole, knitted together by amor patria.

But before entering on the history of Ducetius, it is but respectful to pose him well among his subjects, else he may escape us altogether as a wandering myth, like Orion or Hercules, an undertaking not easy to accom-

plish among barbarian tribes and in such remote antiquity.

Whoever the Sicani may have been—and their origin is involved in mystery—they were not in good odour among their contemporaries. Homer in the Odyssey twice mentions them, each time in connection with traffic in slaves.

Telemachus is described, as advised by his mother's suitors, "To embark all troublesome strangers from Ithaca (among these is his own father Ulysses, disguised) and to send them across the sea to the Sicanians, "who will give a good price for them."

Whether the native seat of the Sicanian rule was at Acragas (Girgenti) or at an extinct city called Kokalos, on a mountain-top not far distant, or at Kaltabellotta, now a mediæval castle, planted on a cliff over a modern town, swept by a river, and embosomed in cork-woods near Sciacca, or on Monte Platanella on the Mascoli, "a river flowing through a wild glen backed by bare mountains," near Girgenti, or at Omphake, an ancient Sicanian centre, is hard to say.

Speaking largely, one would place the aboriginal Sicanians in the south, from about Acragas (Girgenti) into the centre of the island

at Enna (Castro Giovanni), now a station on the line from Catania to Palermo.

In Faziello's time, huge ruins marked an ancient hill-fort at Leonforte under Enna. (Leonforte another railway station on the same line.) Enna (Umbilicus Sicilæ), with its huge, flat, mountain platform, forming a natural altar dedicated to Demeter, seems planted where it is as the boundary between two races.

For beside the Sicani dwelt the more powerful Siculi, who preserved a certain independence on the summit of steep heights, in the strife of Greek against Greek. Something, too, they gained from the Hellenes, learning their language, and acquiring some of their skill in the arts of war.

But as a nation they were both servile and disunited. Like the Scotch, whom they so much resemble, union as a principle of strength was unknown; there was the old heart-burning of clan against clan, the local jealousies, the small ambitions.

Yet, oppressed and disunited as they were, the Sicels often made themselves felt as a power at Syracuse; "perhaps," says Holm, "they might even have struck a blow against Thrasybulus and Hiero, had any chieftain risen up to lead them."

At length a chieftain did appear in the person of Ducetius, B.C. 461—460.

Within a few years Ducetius had not only reconciled rival tribes, but he had woven every native town, with the exception of Megara-Hybla, into a national league, of which he was the head.

His first recorded act was the siege of Catania; his next, the consolidation of a national capital at Menœ, now Minéo, on a lofty range of hills, between Palagonia and Cattagirone in the great plain of Catania.

This was as much a master-piece of policy, as was the selection of Rome for a Capital among the divided cities of Italy. Menœ, like Rome, was accepted by the united tribes as the *one spot* where jealousies and feuds vanished before the awe inspired by the ancient sanctuary of their faith.

On the great Catanian plain (the only land answering to a plain in the east of Sicily), two miles below modern Minéo, the tranquil waters of the mystic lake of the Palici still sleep in the sunshine.

The Lago Naftia, as it is now called, is of circular form, and of no great depth. Sometimes, indeed, in rainless weather it dries up altogether. To this day, its waters are green,

turbid, and bituminous, as in the time of Ducetius, and three distinct sulphureous craters boil within its marshy margin.

Overlooking this lake, arose, according to Æschylus, the dark portico of the temple of the Palician Deities, very terrible in their dealings with man.

Not even the great oath to Demeter was more binding than that taken to the Dii Palici.

Woe to him who broke it!

From Catania, Ducetius turned his arms towards the West and Acragas, and vainly opposed by Syracusans and Acragentians, captures Motyum, an unknown locality between Syracuse and Acragas. Thus he has gained a sure footing in the Grecian colonies.

This is more than Hellenic pride can brook!

An army yet more numerous than before marches out of Syracuse against him. The two forces encounter each other at Monai—another unknown locality in those broad and beautiful shores between Syracuse and Girgenti.

After a hot struggle the Greeks prevail, and Motyum is retaken. Poor, noble-hearted Ducetius! now is his position desperate.

An armed force behind him—a combined army in front; around him but a few native soldiers, and these not to be relied on.

Should he die by his own sword? No; for with him, will die all hope for the Siculi; that dastard race for whom he has sacrificed so much. Should he throw himself into a strong town and fight? Menœ, for instance? Or within the walls of the Palician temple?

Perhaps Menœ would not receive him. Neither gods nor men seemed certain to the broken-spirited Ducetius. Death awaits him on all sides. Yet he would not die, for with him will die Siculia!

In the darkening shades of evening—(it was in the early spring when Motyum was taken, and the days were short)—Ducetius throws himself upon a horse, and does not draw rein until he reaches Syracuse.

When morning breaks, and the citizens and the slaves gather about the market-place, before Minerva's temple in Ortygia, to greet each other and buy the provisions of the day, a tall, gaunt, ill-clad stranger is seen clinging to the sanctuary of the altar.

He addresses those who approach him, stretching forth his hands as a suppliant.

"It is I, O Syracusans! Ducetius, whom you have vanquished! Ducetius, but yesterday king of Siculia, now a fugitive and your prisoner. I have fought you loyally. I have

defended my native land. I would have driven you out, O Grecian Strangers—I do not deny it, by no treason or treachery, but in the open field. My Siculians have melted before your arms. My ambition has died within me. Now I am but Ducetius of Menœ—a free-born man, your subject. I deliver myself into your hands. I place Siculia at your feet. Have mercy on her! Spare my people!"

As he speaks, the morning light strikes upon the king's bare head, and illumines the wondrous beauty of the shrine, the sculptured doors of gold, ivory and ebony, the gilded roof, on which an enormous brazen shield flings back the dazzling sun-rays, the temple walls, glowing with paintings of Syracusan artists, and exploits of Syracuse by land and sea: Hiero in his galleys defeating the Etruscans off Cumae, the landing of the first Greeks at Naxos, the coming of Archias to Syracuse, the founding of the cities of Messina and Catania and Leontini.

With a sigh Ducetius hides his head in his mantle, as his eyes travel over these pictorial records, witnesses of his country's servitude. Alas! Will not his own defeat at Motyum offer the next subject to tempt the artist's skill?

Meanwhile a crowd of priests, magistrates and citizens, assemble before the Portico of Minerva, talk loudly and move to and fro, within the limits of the same market-place, which has come down to us to this day, open to the soft sea-breezes and honeyed scents from Hybla.

The space fills to overflowing. The word passes round that the Siculian king is captured. Every one presses to look at him.

"What is to be done with him?"

"Is he to live or die?"

"Let him die," cried the young men, "as he caused ours to die." Others shout, "To the galleys with him!" "Drown him!"

But the older men, who have known too much blood-shedding under Hiero, say, "Spare him! He has come to us of his own will; he has freely taken refuge within our city walls. Remember what is due to the honour of Syracuse. He has appealed to the gods. If the gods, on their altar, give no sign, let their sanctuary be respected."

There is a great stir among the people. The arcaded market-place sways to and fro with a doubtful multitude. There is some skirmishing, and swords even are drawn.

At last the counsels of mercy prevail.

The young men are hustled outside, into the side streets; the remainder, the older and wiser citizens, call out with one voice, "Let him live!"

Yet it was clear that Ducetius could not remain in Syracuse; he would be a constant focus of rebellion. The fugitive Siculians in the mountains, the disaffected among the citizens and the demos (and where were there not disaffected in Syracuse?), would all endeavour to make use of his name.

Of course, Ducetius swore the terrible oath by the Dii Palici, as much feared by the Greeks as by the Sicels, "never to return to his people without the leave of Syracuse." But what is an oath? Not even an oath to the infernal gods could bind a patriot like Ducetius. So he was shipped off to Corinth.

How it came about is not clear. But in a short time Ducetius was back again, ranging the Siculian mountains with his bands.

Had he broken his pledge? I cannot say. History answers no such question.

Ducetius himself declared that he returned to Sicily in obedience to an oracle, which decreed that he was to found a colony on the "beautiful shore."

If fraud there were, and a false oracle, both

Corinthians and Syracusans were a party to it; nor would they have helped an enemy to return, had they not expected advantage from it.

The new colony is founded B.C. 446, on the "beautiful shore," as it was called in the oracle. It was called Kalatto. Now, all the coasts of Sicily are beautiful, but no shore is lovelier than that northern coast, backed by the wondrous range of the Madornian mountains; the rock of Cefalù, the point of Zaffarana, the Semitic ruin of Solunto, and the graceful lines of countless curves and bays, points and promontories, that break the azure seaboard.

I dare not stop to think of that "beautiful shore" as I saw it from Solunto, one soft spring evening, fair as a dream, and delicate with unearthly tintings!

I must hasten on to relate that Kalatto (now Calacte) lies inland from Cefalù, at Caronia. There is still the "Marina di Caronia," a golden stretch of sand down by the sea, backed by groves of tamarisk and cistus; the village of Caronia; and behind "the Bosco," cork, and oak, and pine—the biggest forest of Sicily. It is old Diodorus who speaks of this same forest at Kalatto, under another name. You may see the place now; build up Kalatto in your own imagination, and invoke the shade of Ducetius

—Ducetius, a hero without arms, a patriot without a nation!

You will find antique remains to help your fancy—clay fragments, principally about the village of Caronia; and legends come down from a remote antiquity.

The town of Menœ on the hills, over the sombre lake of the Palici has vanished, even as a site; but Kalatto, "the beautiful coast," still lives in Caronia.

I will by no means answer for your safety in going there; the Madornian mountains and their lofty spurs and off-shoots, forest-covered glens, and deep gorges, torn by rushing torrents, have always been an impregnable haunt of banditti.

Nevertheless, Calacte, as the Italians name it, is there; rich, fertile, beautiful. The sea is full of fish; the forests alive with game; and flocks and herds feed upon the hills as in the early time.

Many years Ducetius ruled in Kalatto. He tried once more to form a national league, whether as a conspiracy against the friendly Syracusans, or permitted by them to serve as a fighting nucleus against hostile Greek cities, Acragas, and others is not clear.

In vain! While forming the league he died, smitten by a sudden illness. Was this

the vengeance of the Dii Palici upon one who had broken an oath sworn on their crater? Or was it poison?

All that remains of him is an heroic memory, a beacon in the darkness of Siculian night, fading back into barbarism.

Faziello tells us he saw the Arabic castle which replaced the Siculian stronghold of Ducetius.

So now, without apology for this long digression (so well does it fit in with the story of the land) I return to where I am standing at Giardini station, overlooking the lonely bay of Naxos.

CHAPTER XIV.

The Ascent to Taormina.—The Mad Peaks.—Modern Taormina.—The Hotel.—A Polyglot Crew.—The Theatre.—Saracen and Norman at Taormina.

A GREAT many people got out of the train at Giardini. Every traveller to Sicily must visit Taormina. They had all gone on before I addressed myself to the ascent. I had been standing on the shore, studying Naxos. Then I mount a perpendicular steep, by a zigzag road, my boxes tied on to the back of a most rickety carriage.

The scenery is grand in the extreme, but I do not enjoy it. Furiosa insists on wrangling with the driver about the fare, to the delight of a light squadron of nasty little boys accompanying us (*obligato*) from the station.

Furiosa is a good woman, but Germanic, and absolutely impracticable. She does her duty in her own way, and defies remonstrance.

Once I have seen her in a passion, and I hope never to do so again.

On that occasion she flung everything available, including my own clothes, at my head, and herself out of the room as a finale.

We are winding up among the great, dusky rocks of Taurus, hanging out over the sea in a black confusion. On one side the bay of Catania, with that long, harmonious line of Cape Passaro and the bays of Giarre, Mascoli, and Aci, bright as autumn flowers.

On the other, the Messinian side, the whole mountain-bound coast rears itself up in magnificent cliffs and headlands; broad-breasted Calabria lies opposite, and the blue straits between—a wondrous panorama, painted as with clear pastel colours, so clear and delicate it is!

As we turn acute angles up the hill (indeed we turn so often that I come at last not to know my right hand from my left) how majestic are those buttresses of rock! Those black ravines and sharp-cut rifts! Those piled up mountains melting into clouds! What a heaven! What an earth!

Now I am gazing down upon the calm surface of an azure-tinted cove, shut in by tawny rocks. A wide yawning cave-mouth

opens at one side upon banks of golden sand, where tiny wavelets break; a splintered mass of sun-dried limestone fills up the centre, and around lie shells and seaweed, a place altogether for Ariadne, Dido, Nausica, or some ethereal presence of the earliest time, to be sung by Theocritus, or Dafne.

Nearer the town of Taormina, some four miles distant from Giardini, the wildness of the scenery is somewhat tamed. I pass stone balustrades projecting into space, with seats to rest the traveller by the sight of that transcendant landscape. Mouldering Roman tombs lie buried in a rank growth of sea-pinks, acanthus and spurge, and crumbling ruins rise out of fields of purple flag flowers. A large convent towers above, nobly seated on a cliff, in a maze of almond, pepper, and magnolia trees, set in a groundwork of blooming parterres. This beautiful convent is appropriated as a dwelling by Mr. Rainforth; but nature is so enthralling that nothing artificial, ancient, modern, or mediæval, has a chance of notice.

Now we are on a level isthmus-ledge joining the two rocky cliffs on which stand modern Taormina—altogether, as it were in air; smaller indeed than the ancient city, but still faithfully poised on the same foundations.

Siculian first, next Greek, Siculian once more, Greek again under Andromachus, with fugitives from Naxos, then Roman, Byzantine, Greek, and later Norman—what tales those walls could tell!

Behind, wildly flinging themselves upwards, rise three tall peaks, as of mountains altogether gone mad and raving.

In the changeful mistiness of an autumn evening, I fancy these are clouds. Not a bit of it. Well ascertained acclivities with the vestige of a little path upon the lowest, mounting, as it were, the skies.

The nearest peak of a yellow-grey, splintered and cleft like a lump of spar, and so upright, that it becomes a question how it supports itself, is divided into two heads: one thrusting itself forward headlong over the town, and crowned with the battlements of a ruined Saracenic Norman castle; the other in the rear, carrying the outline of a little church, and the vague vestige of a house or two; Saracenic Norman castle and church (Madonna della Rocca), both so precisely the tint of the rock, that it requires time and patience to disentangle each, and not to put the whole down as a further evidence of mountain insanity.

But for a few far-off tufts of spurge and

wind-torn aloes clinging in distant crevices, I might be looking at an outline in Tartarus, so hard and vitrified is its surface.

Upon this rock was the acropolis of ancient Naxos. Behind the double peak rises a third eccentricity, altogether apart and aerial. This is Mola, the old Siculian seat, whence the barbarians looked down contemptuously on the fastidious Greeks, buzzing like bees in their acropolis below.

I consider these three rocks dominating Taormina as a group of monsters. Nothing can familiarise me with their repulsive presence.

Still further back rise lofty mountain-chains, cleft by yawning ravines and precipices; their distorted summits thrusting themselves into the sky.

I was called on to distinguish the highest point as Monte Venere, and I am told that misguided tourists from Taormina often reach it.

I am quite satisfied with the marvels of the road. As an "Idle woman," these mountains on the whole rather overwhelm me. I hate climbing, and I prefer the beautiful to the terrible in nature.

Now, the scenery about Taormina is the acme of the terrible.

The long street of Taormina is filthy,

depressing and ruinous. The numerous family groups of all nations, picking their way in the mud is not attractive spite of the façades of Norman-Gothic palaces, mediæval churches, and many a quaint "bit" of delicate sculpture.

To its extremest length, from the Giardini Gate, to the Porta Tocca, under the mad peaks—this street follows the edge of a rocky precipice, from which you might drop a plummet line to the shore at Giardini. At the further end is the principal inn facing the south.

I pass under an archway into a weedy courtyard bounded by a low wall. Straight before me, in all its length and breadth, rises Etna. Nothing lies between.

Snow has fallen and lies thick in the clefts of the wooded region round the cone, and white clouds heavy with storms gather about the crater.

This is a new phase of the great mountain; less varied but more imposing. On all sides, except behind, where the precipices of Mola and the range of Monte Venere shut up the horizon, Etna fills the eye.

Mounting a flight of steps into the hotel, I am confirmed in my opinion that the merits of Taormina are confined altogether to the outside.

A more wretched, ill-smelling, ill-furnished,

cold, and draughty caravanserai, I never entered.

As I saw it, it was crammed to overflowing with tourists of all nations. French shrieking in the passages, Germans smoking on the stairs, English and Norwegians returning from mountain excursions, dripping with mud and snow, Russians arriving, swearing, in broken-down landaus, with luggage enough to furnish a house, escorted by a troop of expectant boys. The hotel is full of boys of all ages, and in all degrees of squalor, ugliness, and dirt.

Now an English party, bags in hand, bar the corridor. They are quarrelling over the bill.

"Ma, padrone, non pago questo chose."

"Si, si, lo pagherete!" shouts the landlord in a rage; "altro che lo pagherete!"

"No, monsieur; va console Inglese a Messina."

"Al diavolo!" roars the landlord, throwing his arms in the air; "Messina! We are at Taormina. Consuls to the Inferno, me lo pagherete."

And so on, da capo.

I am lodged in a cell downstairs, with one window, as high as the ceiling. I accept it joyfully, for it is warm and quiet. The snow

on Etna has made the air piercing, and in the better rooms above neither doors nor windows close properly, and the walls are so thin that I am informed one unhappy *poitrinaire*, who certainly must die, keeps an entire floor awake all night with coughing.

The extortionate landlord rushes about in a vain attempt to keep order, and grows insolent if you remonstrate.

"You see how full we are," he remarks to me with a grim smile, and a wave of his hand as if to take in all his abominable accommodation. "I have turned away two English families to-day; two English milords, you understand? Taormina is full of hotels, Signora. You can accommodate yourself elsewhere if mine does not suit you. Do you, or do you not, intend to keep your room at the price I demand? Two gentlemen are now waiting on the stairs for your answer to engage it."

The greasy Sicilian waiters are as unaccommodating as their master, and the hideous boys who grin about the door, are on the look out to rob you. I am continually facing those boys. My room being on the basement, I have to take an airy turn down a corridor, and up a flight of open stairs (*al fresco*) with Etna grey and freezing opposite, to reach the *table d'hôte*.

Table d'hôte! Good heavens! The cuisine is on a par with the rest of the establishment.

The company is, like the cuisine, execrable! We fight for the dishes, and warm our fingers on the plates. It includes a savage-looking, long-haired Norwegian, the proprietor of the cough, which cough, by the way, only seems to sharpen his appetite (a fact naturally provoking to those he keeps awake, but he certainly will die, if that is any consolation to them); a spinster looking out for a matrimonial niche, pities him, otherwise I can detect nothing but looks of indignation passing round the table, when he heaps cutlets on his plate; a vulgar German artist and his wife, very prominent at meal-times (he is engaged in manufacturing pictures out of "Rococo" bits); and a promiscuous crowd of English, French, and Germans.

Fortunately I have the resource of Mr. Rainforth and his poetic convent on the cliff, embosomed in flowery groves; so, after breakfast, in the teeth of a cutting wind straight from the snow-flanks of Etna, I pass out of the Saracenic walls of Taormina, touched up by Charles V. (one continually finds oneself *vis-à-vis* to Charles V. in Sicily) and drink countless cups of good warm tea in my friend's excellent company.

I find I am expected to admire various architectural "bits" in ragged palaces, a grim cathedral spotted with damp and mildew, and several other churches in the long straggling street, all "Rococo," or Sicilian Gothic, as Mr. Denis calls it, as well as many foliated capitals, slender-clustered shafts, ogee arches, and dog-tooth mouldings.

I am also tormented to look at a Naumachia at the top of a precipice, which, as being an obvious discrepancy, I altogether refuse to do. Indeed, Taormina is so ruinous and mangy, and the "bits" are so few and far between, and I myself so angry, that I decline to go anywhere.

Even the palace of the Duca di San Stefano with "bits" all over, fails to excite me. I can only see the slush and the mud before it, naked children and pigs wallowing in the puddles, and Herr ——, the obnoxious German artist, with flying hair, sitting at his easel, perfectly unmoved, walled in by a solid mass of street-humanity, fingering him all over and staring.

It is true that there are other *sei disotto* hotels, but they are much worse. Taormina exists on the principle of a rotten borough. Everybody *must* come, and everybody *must* put up with what he finds. A really comfortable

hotel would make any man's fortune. Will no one try?

Along the thin edge of an olive-wooded precipice, looking down over cactus-scrub and palmetto sprouting out of holes and crevices, tiny patches of green corn, and sheets of flowering almonds—all clinging on to the rocks, so as not to fall down into the sea, I make my way to the far-famed theatre.

To reach it I must grope through abominable alleys, paved with the roughest of stones, mount flights of earthy, breakneck steps, or rather fragments of steps, and pick my way through nastiness unutterable!

At last I reach a wooden gate in a dark corner. I know I am right, for I am accosted by a custode in official livery. The custode after opening the gate, has the amazing discretion to conceal himself. Jewel of a man! Would I could immortalize him!

Before me is the theatre, belted by a circuit of artificially-scooped-out rocks.

The first glance disappoints me. A unique position, I say to myself, but utterly unpoetic.

Roman red bricks, showing off against white marble pillars amidst a grey loneliness, hung up between earth and sky! *Bricks* in the same world with the amber-tinted blocks of Segeste,

creamy-pillared Girgenti, and sun-dyed Solunto! The Romans themselves are so modern in Sicily, their bricks are but a detail. But nothing can poetize bricks! From first to last I cannot abide *them!*

Nor do I forgive this present theatre for replacing the Greek original. It is so stiff and common-place. Guide-books tell me that the stage is the best preserved in Europe—this concerns me but little. The colours and the architecture are neither harmonious nor imposing, and Taormina is a spot where Nature is so lavishly prodigal. Man must follow suit.

Behind the proscenium are three arches divided by clustered marble pillars. The central arch, or royal gate, as it is called, much loftier than the side ones, is broken in the midst.

Between the yawning columns appears the glorious sea, the mountains, and Etna.

The walls are stripped of all ornament. The mouth of a channel, or passage running beneath the stage, has been laid bare; also another passage crossing this one at right angles, called the bronterium, from the brass vessels filled with stones, to imitate the thunder, which were kept here.

Of the proscenium, or stage itself, probably

of wood, ninety-seven feet long and thirty-eight feet deep, the brick foundations alone remain.

On either hand are the huge fragments of two vaulted halls, or temples, or, as some say, "green-rooms" for the actors.

In front is the semi-circular amphitheatre, with ranges of seats for four thousand spectators. Few of these, cut in the limestone rock, are entire.

The stucco still clings to the walls of the scena, and white pillars supporting the central arches cutting sharp against the deep red of the bricks, may lend themselves to *painting* but are fatal to prose. How can I make "*bricks*" interesting?

It is only when I arrive at what was once the upper seats, into which the ruined mouths of ten vomitories open, that the ill-humour which has possessed me ever since I came to Taormina vanishes.

I stand amidst a universe of blue—blue over heaven and sea, and such a sea—with dashes of orange, lilac, and purple, as the light falls from passing clouds on mighty breakers rolling in southward from Greece.

To the right, Etna, in all the majesty of its eleven thousand feet of altitude, cuts the sky as sharp as steel, without an intervening cloud, fills

up the picture. What a world! What memories! Jove's throne, Vulcan's workshop, the Titans' prison, the Cyclops' home, Demeter's torch, the fiery dungeon of Enceladus, the tomb of Empedocles!

The broad white flanks sweep down into a fertile plain dashed with green and veined with blackened lava-streams; towers, towns, villages, convents, churches on every height, gleaming white in the transparent atmosphere.

Full in this glorious prospect sat the Greek, and after him the Roman, to nourish himself at Nature's banquet, and drink in the verse of Sophocles or Euripides, with a fiery crater for a background! Here, he could tell himself that the whole universe could offer nothing fairer or more awful.

Now one last look, and then adieu for ever to the sunny capes kissing the sapphire waves, to graceful bays basking in loveliness, to the rich harmony of yellow strands and tawny rocks, to weird, wild heights, and that grey old town crowning the cliffs, cold and hard against a lemon-tinted sky.

Adieu to the thick, rich turf bordering the ruins, to the beds of peas and marigolds, molewort and sea-pink, homely buttercups and trailing convolvulus that paint the ground! Adieu

to the sheltering arches under which my foot sinks deep into acanthus and vine leaves, ivy and moss. Where the very stones are beautiful, clothed with golden lichens; and where spurge and rush, caper and fern, aloes and fennel wreath the ancient tombs!

Adieu! Adieu!

As the scene fades before me my thought passes on to later times, and dwells on two episodes in the changing history of Taormina.

Greek has been succeeded by Roman, Roman by Byzantine, and now rocky Taormina is the last stronghold in Sicily, with the exception of Castro Giovanni (Enna), which holds out against the Saracens.

Ibrahim, the Saracen Emir, is on the road from Palermo to conquer it; and Byzantine Leo, called the Philosopher, far away on a remote throne at Constantinople, instead of sending an army to oppose him, is building churches and monasteries on the Bosphorus.

Leo can think of nothing better than to despatch a certain Eastern bishop to Taormina, called St. Elia, eighty years old, and certainly childish, to defend it by his prayers.

St. Elia prays, kneeling in the middle of the narrow street, bound in chains, and attired in his drawers. He does not exhort the soldiers

to fight, but to cleanse themselves from sin; nevertheless, he evokes the memory of Grecian Epaminondas and of Roman Scipio, and prophesies destruction to every one.

"See," cries this espicopal Cassandra, "what rivers of blood flow through these streets! Behold the corpses of the Greeks upon these stones! The infidel is on the road! He is coming. He is here."

But no attention is paid to St. Elia by the Byzantine garrison, and after a vain defence, impregnable Taormina is taken by Ibrahim's soldiery to the fierce shout of "Ak bar Allah."

"This," says Amari, "happened on a Sunday, the 1st of August, A.D. 910."

But even as the Mussulman had robbed Sicily whole and entire from the Goth, so in turn they were to yield it whole and entire to another foe.

When the victorious banner of Count Roger de Hauteville waved over the rocks of Taormina, and the Norman knights and squires assembled in thanksgiving within the Gothic cathedral of San Niccolo, Sicily was Norman!

CHAPTER XV.

Where is Antonio?—Round Etna.—The Black Country.—Towns and People.—The Ascent.—Desolation.—A Feudal Castle.—The Descent.—An Awful Road.—Welcome to Maniace.

I WAS to be met at Piedimonte, one station on from Giardini, by a vetturino to take me to Maniace.

Now, to start fair with my readers, I must explain that Maniace is a house, and not the Byzantine General historically renowned in the eleventh century. Maniace, the house, lies immediately under the further side of Etna, eight miles from Bronté. The site has retained the name from a neighbouring town founded in honour of General George, patron of the Normans, and commander of the Byzantine armies after Belisarius and Narses.

From Maniace, General, the site after eighteen centuries passed to Nelson, Admiral; in gift from the king of the Two Sicilies. Now, it is possessed, together with the title of Duke of Bronté, by his lineal descendant.

To arrive in time at Piedimonte I rise at three a.m. Hours are early in Sicily; the express train generally starts about four, more or less punctually.

When I descended on the Piedimonte platform, I looked round. There was the usual allowance of tumble-down fiacres, and one decent-looking laudau. Into this I was lightly stepping, when a voice from the box arrested me.

"Signora," the voice cried, "this is the carriage of Signor Gregorio, I am waiting for him. You cannot use it."

"Are you not Antonio, who is to take me to Maniace?" I asked.

"No, I am not Antonio," very sulky this time the voice. "I do not know him. I am Signor Gregorio's coachman No one shall take liberties with my master's carriage."

I turned round aghast to the porter carrying my bags, and beheld Furiosa's eyes flashing and her mouth wide open, preparing for a fight with the coachman of Signor Gregorio.

"Be silent, Maria, and look after the luggage," I said. "Where is Antonio, porter?"

"I do not know, Signora."

"Where does he live?"

"Up in Piedimonte;" and the porter pointed to a dark crown of buildings somewhere among the clouds.

"How am I to get to Maniace if Antonio is not here?" I asked, feeling plainly I was to be pitied.

The porter, a good-natured man, and sorry for me, suggested calling the *impiegato*. The station-master, or *impiegato*, leaving his desk, came, and with most humane eyes sympathized.

"How can I find Antonio? I am going to stay with the Signor Duca at Maniace. Here are my boxes, what am I to do?"

The *impiegato* suggested *patience* and the waiting-room.

"Yes," said I, "but patience will not get me to Maniace, forty miles on the other side of Etna, before night. Antonio was to be here when the train arrived at eleven. It is now twelve and he is not come."

"I will do anything for you that I can," said the polite official. "I am very sorry the Signora is disappointed. It is a long journey to Maniace, all uphill for at least thirty miles round the back of Etna; and the road is freshly mended with lava. The weather, too, is cold and stormy."

I had always dreaded this expedition to Maniace. Etna looked so grey and deathlike from Taormina ; three parts covered with snow, the rest as black as ink. And there was a chance, at any moment, of another storm coming on, and the road being blocked up.

But the Duchess had sent three telegrams. In the last she had said that "Antonio would be in waiting for me at Piedimonte at eleven o'clock on that day, Thursday." Now, who Antonio was I did not know, only that he was to take me to Maniace.

"I am very sorry for you, Signora," repeated the polite *impiegato*, reflectively. "Come into my room, there is a fire."

Just as I was turning my back on the road, the jingling of harness and of horse hoofs was heard coming in haste through an olive wood lying between the station and the shore.

"That is Antonio's young man," said the *impiegato*, brightening up most sympathetically, and pointing to a half-naked figure astride a bare-backed horse, with a gigantic bridle.

Antonio's young man, a boy, arrives breathless, leaps down, hitches up his falling trousers, sailor-fashion (by this time all the *personnel* of the station is collected round me and Furiosa), and thus delivers himself:—

"Sor' Antonio is coming up with the carriage directly. He makes excuses to the Excellency for being late."

The boy is panting, the thin bony horse panting also.

"Why is Antonio not here?" I ask indignantly, forgetting that in Sicily no one ever is where he ought to be, or ever answers a question except with a lie.

"I do not know," says the boy, too young to be inventive.

It is well past twelve o'clock before a rattling of wheels is heard coming very fast through the same olive wood.

"Antonio is certainly on the road now," says the kind *impiegato*, who still hovers about me benevolently. Meanwhile, he has had my modest trunk removed within the rails of the platform, away from the beggars who, at intervals all through this scene, have been rushing at me as much as they dare.

A travel-worn landau now appears, dashing up to the gates, and Antonio announces himself by throwing down the reins and springing from the box. He is not in the least affected by all the trouble he has given, and, whip in hand, smiles at me serenely.

"Why were you not here at eleven?" I ask,

as the modest trunk is being lashed on behind. "The Duchess telegraphed 'eleven precisely.'"

"Signora," says Antonio, taking off his hat, "I was slightly incommoded, and one of my horses went lame. But we have plenty of time."

All this I knew to be lies; but, *cui bono?* When a whole population lies, one cannot reproach an individual.

At what hour shall we arrive?"

"About nightfall." (Now, as we are in the month of March this may mean anything.)

"Is it safe?" I ask next.

"Perfectly, Signora. I drove the Signor Duca down last week without an escort. But the roads are newly mended with lava, and are very heavy, we must go generally at a walking pace. The Signora must be prepared for this. Pray let us start."

"We should have been half way up Etna by this time but for you," puts in Furiosa, with the air of a war-horse scenting battle. "All very fine to talk of 'starting,' when the Signora has been waiting for you more than an hour."

This reproach Antonio affects not to hear. With a masterful roll of his dark eyes, and the mere shadow of a smile on his lips, he hands me into the carriage, Furiosa grumbling in her native tongue, and the bags follow.

There are three horses: one in front, tandem-fashion, inclined throughout the journey to be discursive, and to peep over precipices; the others immoveably steady. The ragged boy is, I find, to accompany us, stationed behind on my box. I may mention, *en passant*, that that boy utterly ruins my box, reducing its surface to a pulpy substance with the stamping of his naked feet. When we go up-hill he runs beside us; when we go down, he stamps on the lid.

His eyes wait on the Padrone; he is continually fiddling with the harness, adjusting the bits, or smoothing the reins. When he lags behind, Antonio whistles to him; and when beside him he discourses in the Sicilian dialect with an air of benignant superiority.

Up the slopes of Etna we labour by a zig-zag route to the town of Piedimonte. As at Taormina, the station is on the shore, quite irrespective of the town. The day is grey, misty, and squally. Now and then the wind sweeps off the clouds in the valleys, and a dash of lurid light illumines mountain bases along a rocky river bed; but our general out-look is murky. Taormina to the right, and Etna to the left, are hopelessly veiled.

I hear the Fiume Freddo dashing down as we labour up-hill. The river Cantara and its

bridge we leave to our right. The Cantara and the Fiume Freddo are the two principal outlets of the snows of Etna on this side. The Cantara debouches at Giardini; the Fiume Freddo runs down to the sea at Piedimonte station. Its icy waters are said to be poisonous. At any rate, the trout and eels do not think so, as I came to know at Maniace.

We fly across the high arches of an old bridge (the Ponte della Disgraziata), over the parapet of which our tandem horse, dangerously reflective, gazes into the foaming waters. Antonio, an admirable driver, suitably admonishes now, and on every other occasion, this misplaced curiosity. The Fiume Freddo is one of the mountain streams said to have sprung from the blood of Acis. In its whirling current down Etna's side we picture the beautiful shepherd ever fleeing from the terrible Polyphemus.

Now we pass altogether into a black lava world. The road is black as the country, and so continues all day. The stones piled up to mend it are black also. The vineyards are terraced in rich black earth. The rocks are black; ravines, cliffs, valleys, boulders, precipices, black also. A few orange-grounds and olive-woods, and those omnipresent cacti, bursting through stony limits, dash the sombre earth

for a little way with colour; then these also vanish.

Terraced vineyards are everywhere—above, below, at hand. The lava earth is precious for good wine. The sun darts down upon the metallic soil, giving the grapes that much-approved burnt flavour.

Every foot of ground is utilized for vines. On the most inaccessible rocks, under the very snows of Etna, on the edge of Tartarean lava-streams, invading the bounds of mighty chestnut and oak forests, I can spy out vineyards.

The industry is marvellous. The cleanness of the ground, the healthiness of the plants, show this. No *dolce far niente* for the poor peasant here, as in the sunny gardens of the sea-shore. Hard work and patient labour are needful to draw wine from this lava-smitten soil.

Piedimonte, built of lava, is a wretched, poverty-stricken town of one-storied houses; the roofs strapped down, as it were, ready for avalanches of snow or of fire.

We pass through the single street at full gallop, Antonio lashing the tandem horse into a flying madness. The beggars have no chance. Outside, we mount again at a foot's pace.

Quite a different population this from the seaboard; thin, hard-featured, leather-skinned

peasants, quite Scotch in their ugliness. A sad-eyed child, her head bound by a thick red cloth (any scrap of available clothing is always piled on the head) looks up at me with pitiful eyes, as she trails along upon her naked feet, dragging a heavy axe behind her. Does she want a penny, that little maid? or is her pathetic gaze but the sadness of poverty? A father, in knee-breeches and blue stockings and a ragged coat, with a wallet at his back, followed by two pinched, hungry-faced boys, trudge painfully, bare-footed, through sharp stones. Where is that father bound for? Infinite space is before us; the terrible crater at one side; boulders of lava as big as houses beside the road.

Always ascending, we reach a second squalid-looking town, Linguagrossa, built also of lava. Linguagrossa (so named from its ugly dialect) is seventeen hundred feet above the sea!

Linguagrossa, backed by the dark line of forests, is bad; but it is better than Piedimonte.* There are carved balconies to the windows, bringing with them just a suspicion of rustic Rosinas, guitars, castanets, and moonlit nights; and the one long, wide street is full of people staring. Whether it is a *festa*, I know not.

* Since the last eruption, Linguagrossa will not look so well.

I find melancholy children not incidental, but indigenous. Blue and black eyes of every shade are turned upon me imploringly.

Mr. Antonio, however, flies along whenever he can, profiting by every inch of level ground to push on his horses. He is saluting friends with his whip all the way. When he meets an acquaintance, the ragged boy, hanging on behind, performs, as I discover to my cost, acrobatic feats on the lid of my box. These raise a languid smile upon the sad faces of the peasants.

More barren and more wintry grow the acclivities of Etna.

As we mount upwards, we penetrate into shifting mist clouds almost palpable; lava ridges break out of the snow, the woods over our heads are white and hoary, and small cones and extinct craters upheave beside us.

Beyond Linguagrossa even the lava vineyards little by little fall away, and are succeeded by small hazel-woods as green and nutty-looking as Berkshire copses. Like these, they are cut for burning, leaving the tufted roots mossy and verdant. Not only hazel-woods, but silver birch, and the grass being sprinkled with familiar primroses and milk-wort. The sight of these May flowers and the quaint copses, along with the cloudiness and the

greyness, and the keen damp air beating in my face, comes to me like a vision of home and of England!

We are always mounting, always at a foot's pace, and always on the surface of a black road newly laid with lava; a very disagreeable process, I can declare from experience.

You must love your friends very much to reach them, forty miles over a lava-bed.

The erratic boy is the only bright object in the ghastly landscape. He vaults up and down like a monkey, laughs to himself, sings, whistles, runs and leaps beside the horses, chatters incessantly to Antonio, and turns wheels at the corners of the road.

As the scene grows more and more desolate and involved with accumulating lava, the boy becomes more and more discursive, and Antonio increasingly condescending. Towards me he maintained a civil, but rigid, demeanour. On every subject except the "Duca" I find him impenetrable.

As to talking with the Furiosa, I never dream of it. She regards the whole journey with jaundiced eyes, and herself as a victim to circumstances.

If I speak, I know she will complain, so I hold my peace.

We are rising painfully round the flanks of the mighty volcano crater, of which we can see nothing but an impenetrable wall of mist.

Above us, piercing through the snow, the lower spurs of the wooded region of Etna follow us. I can see the skeletons of huge trees lining the sides of sombre cliffs and snow-clad gorges.

The clouds sweep across even this limited view, and now and then we are favoured by a violent snow-storm. In spite of the upraised hood, it beats coldly in our faces. Furiosa, with indignant glances, heaps shawls upon her head. I draw my sealskin closer round me.

Still mounting! Antonio will give no certain information. It is about three o'clock now; he always says we shall be at the summit in an "oretta." (They will go out of their way here to invent a lie rather than answer a question.)

How cold it is! Snow patches beside the road, and lying about in the little English copses. I do not put my wraps on my head like the Furiosa—fortunately she has dozed off to sleep—but I am glad to cover myself as with bed-clothes.

Now and then the clouds lift a little to our right, and I can espy a deep, deep valley, mapped out on the further side by purple mountains.

This is the upper valley of the Cantara, cleaving asunder lava beds, as it thunders downward to the sea at Piedimonte.

On the further side of Etna, the Simeto, rending apart green downs and tossed-up hillocks, cuts deep into the mountain-flanks, and flows drowsily into the sea through the great plain of Catania.

On every side mountains rise over our heads—grave, sombre, repulsive.

They might be of cast-iron but for scaly patches here and there, of coarse grass and brown moss: a scene such as Dante dreamed for his "Inferno"—where the dead earth is bound in a black winding-sheet!

The sight of Randazzo, a small mediæval town, is a great relief, the houses massed upon a conical hill, like a background of Masaccio or Ghirlandajio.

You enter it through a wall and a gate—quite refreshing, I assure you, after a sea of lava waves.

Yonder are the ruins of a feudal castle, perched on a rock; and there are human beings in the narrow streets and shops—a living world in fact, the existence of which I began to doubt, as we crawled up the naked sides of Etna.

Randazzo anywhere would be an interest-

ing little place, how much more here, amid the weariness induced by lava.

In the time of Count Roger, it was a great centre of Norman-Saracenic annals. The encircling walls, and towers, the Castle and sculptured house-fronts, with pointed doors and ogee windows, announce the period.

The Emperor, Frederick II., born of a Norman mother, and through her, King of Sicily, christened Randazzo "Ætnea"—not the first city so named, as I shall have to tell hereafter. The Great Crater is only twelve miles distant.

For a little space, the earth laughs back at us, in gardens and fruit grounds. There are vineyards and fig-trees, and prickly pear and aloes make hedges for tiny fields, which men are tilling.

Deep below rises ridge upon ridge of mountains (I can count seven), opening into as many valleys, towards the centre of the island. But all is so dim and shadowy, that these mountains might be grey clouds, or the grey clouds mountains!

Nothing is positive but that black mystery over our heads, and the black road before us.

Antonio, now grown into a mass of overcoats and capes, is dull and silent. I would not in-

sinuate that he is dozing, but if not, his immobility is amazing.

The tandem horse, resigned now, and incurious as an ancient wheeler, scents the keen air with upturned ears, and goes on his way subdued and patient. The boy still runs beside the wheel when the road allows it, but runs as one whose legs are weary!

Whenever I have interrogated Antonio as to the distance, he has two answers, which he uses turn about. "The Excellence will arrive after night-fall"; or, "In an *oretta*." Can anything be more vague?

Looking, as from a balloon, I make out a town, deep down over a precipice—to my right—a tawny-walled, desolate town of massed-up houses gathered round a castle. I am told that this is Maletto. The broad valley of the Cantara yawns beneath.

Before us, a dolomitic rock shoots up—straight on end—against a pale lemon-tinted sky. In the twilight it might be a Cyclops, barring our path.

Heavens! how our road circled round that rock for miles and miles in a kind of serpentine conglomeration of zigzags!

Now we have advanced so far that Etna is drawing off, out of sight, behind. Yet, though

unseen, its awful presence is felt—in the famine-stricken land; in the empty river-beds, dried up by lava; the precipices up-hurled; the rocks shivered!

I have much of the resignation of the old traveller about me—I bow to the inevitable. But as the cold wind whirls across the rocks and screams among the crannies, I feel I have had enough.

What sustains me is the unmoved aspect of Antonio's back. As I view it from the inside of the carriage, whether he is waking or sleeping, it is full of confidence; also the cock of his hat eminently re-assuring. If he did this road last week, with the Signor Duca, I can, and ought to do it now, though I am not a Duca.

At this point, when apparently driving into space, we take a sudden turn and descend a road so steep that the carriage is almost lifted to the horses' flanks, as they cautiously feel their way. The tandem horse, specially careful, smells the road like a dog.

A roaring torrent announces its presence by our side. In the gloom I can just see the steely blue waters pouring over stones.

The declivity, the torrent, and the vague outlines of greenish-tinted downs, shut us in on every side.

The skill of Antonio is admirable; but it is an awful road.

"Down, down, among the Dead Men!" I am humming to myself, to an accompaniment of roaring waters and sighing night winds!

There is but a stone or two between our wheels and the brink. Then a violent surging downwards, and an equally violent heaving upwards, and another water-course — bound for heaven knows where—rushes across the road.

Still down, down, down, as if to Tartarus!

Turning an acute angle, with a perilous jerk, a sudden light strikes across my face.

Furiosa screams, Antonio draws up. Before a word is spoken, I cry out, "I know it is Alec, come out to meet me with his lantern!"

"Yes, it is Alec," answers a pleasant voice, "Welcome to Maniace."

CHAPTER XVI.

"My Diary at Maniace."—A Mediæval Monastery.—A Ducal Family.—Home Life.—Etna, the Godlike.—General George Maniace.

HERE is the house;—one long line of windows, all alight.

Under the archway we dash into a blaze of torches and lamps and candles, hastily caught up, and flaring in the wind.

In the cortile stand the Signor Duca and the Signora Duchessa, as in a picture, backed by campieri (rural guards), in a sort of Tyrolese uniform, and servants, male and female, a score.

Coming out of the cold black night, I am fairly dazed. Kind words of welcome mix themselves up in my brain with the windy shouts of Etna and the rush of many waters. My knees barely support me as, on the Duca's arm, I mount the stairs to the "piano nobile."

What luxury and warmth! A large room (the old refectory), square, and full of colour, half hall, half parlour, filled with the scent of flowers. Great logs are blazing on the hearth; a piano, pictures over consoles, vases of spring daffodils and wood hyacinths, hats and gloves ranged on a table against the wall, a letter-box, sofas with dogs asleep on them, dogs also wandering about inclined to bite, a long vista of convent corridors, lighted by ranges of lamps, leading to bedrooms—all is so strangely English, yet so foreign—a comfortable mansion, evolved out of a mediæval monastery, with that mountain desolation outside.

Specially noticeable is the ducal family in the foreground. Alec, without his lantern, resplendent in evening dress; the Duca, tall and aristocratic; the young ladies, lovely; the Duchessa, in a pink dress, all arrayed for dinner. The whole party are so smart and trim, that I am suddenly overcome with shame at my own appearance—my wind-scorched face, my old torn dress, my battered hat, with the feathers all on end, and that indescribable all-pervading "crumpledness" consequent on a long journey.

How dreadful! "Come in here and be quiet," says her Grace, moving about the room like a bright domestic bee. (I am so giddy with

the light and the heat, and the sound of many voices, that I can hardly stand.) In her own hearty way, which has so agreeably affected me ever since we were girls together, she drags me off into the drawing-room, presenting itself to me at that moment as the most gorgeous apartment I ever saw, and shuts the door. I still, however, hear the voices of the party I have left in the saloon.

"Do leave Gru alone!" says A——, "he's so comfortable under a shawl."

"No, no," cries dark-eyed R——, apparently in the act of depriving Gru of his shawl, for sundry low growls reach my ear; "it is a bad habit. Go away, Gru! Downstairs, sir."

"Did the crushing-machine work well, sir?" asks Alec, my friend of the lantern, of his father, shut out of his own drawing-room by the abrupt kindness of the Duchess.

"Capitally," replies the Signor Duca; "it went uphill in splendid form."

"And the stones, papa?" asks a fresh young voice, I know is charming R——'s. "How many stones did you break with your own hands?"

"You may judge by my gloves; they are all in holes. Mend them for me, my dear!" A general laugh follows.

All this time I am telling the Duchess, who

has gradually peeled me of my wraps, like an apple of its rind, all about my journey. She is afraid of nothing. The deluge would not alarm her. She would simply put on her waterproof and goloshes, and go out and look for the ark.

I thought the going round Etna in mist and hail and snow, in an open carriage, a great feat, but she laughs at it.

"Lord! we shall soon teach you not to mind that! at Maniace."

"But it was quite dark! and torrents, too, over the road; why, the wheels quite hissed through them!"

At this she only laughs the more.

Alec, from behind the door, and R——, "If you do that again, I'll ——!"

A scuffle in the next room, peals of laughter, the door opens, and the Duke walks in.

"I wanted to look after those new pigs, but I can't. It is nearly dinner-time. Look at me."

"Yes," says the Duchess, "and not dressed."

I jump up. Dinner time, and dress! Good heavens! Dress—after forty miles' jolting over lava! Can I do it?

"Come along, my dear," says her lively Grace; "unpack your boxes and make yourself

respectable." This said with a glance at my head.

"Yes," I say vaguely. "Yes, respectable for dinner," and I follow her down the monastic gallery to my room, thinking how on earth I shall get Furiosa to do it, or whether I can do it myself.

Of course I must. How can I present myself with my head in its present condition at dinner, before the Duke and Duchess, the young ladies, and all the servants?

Well, I shut my door, and shovel off my clothes. What does one not do in desperation?

I drag everything out of the box. I strew the floor.

Furiosa, frozen with cold, and with many shawls gathered upon her head, stands by stony. She is incapable of help, and inclined to wrath. But just arrived in a "casa ducale," she restrains herself.

Finally, I am turned out, as *from a bag*—well shaken up and dusted. But my hair is impossible. I twist it, I coax it. No use!

One cannot sleep *en coiffure*, yet up at three a.m., travel in wind and rain from that hour until eight p.m., and then expect one's hair to arrange itself! This affair of my

hair depresses me, also the redness of my nose.

I hear the Duke and Duchess in the next room laughing heartily. Are they laughing at *me?* At my *hair?* my old black dress? Why else should they laugh?"

What a fool self-consciousness makes one! Is it likely that the Duke and Duchess, the most good-natured people in the world, should laugh at a guest they have invited to their mountain home?

What a donkey I am! What a donkey any one is who fancies other people trouble their heads about them. Everybody has so much to do, so many subjects of interest; there are so many highways and byways in individuals, in families, in societies; such a narrow circle round each entity, that the moment you are out of sight you are as clean forgotten as though you never existed!

All I remember of the evening is, that, though painfully sleepy, I contrive to listen to what Alec is saying to the Duke about a murderer who rents a farm near the house, and who went away in the morning, after much litigation.

No one seems to care at all about the murderer, not even R——.

The Duchess, who evidently sees a vista of repentance and conversion, is, I think, sorry, that he is dispossessed. The Signor Duca only asks Alec "If he has paid his rent?"

Now I must mention that Alec (I cannot tell you how nice he is) is his father's alter ego, and permanent agent at Maniace. The Duke and Duchess and lovely young ladies being here only on a chance visit.

It is Sunday. While morning service is going on in the saloon, read out by the Duke to the family, including the English servants, and the courier, Mr. Curzon, a very important personage, and much more imposing than the Signor Duca, I will note my impressions.

At Maniace, Etna towers over everything. It dominates us like a Deity. Its presence forms a part and parcel of our daily life, as much as food, or sleep, or motion.

The lines, too few and simple for absolute beauty, are utterly overwhelming. A dazzling cone, perfectly shadowless, pinnacles against a cold, blue sky. Beneath the cone, close at hand, one dark horizontal line of bank cuts across it. This bank is the "*Balzò*," an accumulation of ancient lava beds, rent with crevices and grottoes, and sprinkled with a sober verdure. That is all.

What a mystery between those lines—the white crater and the dark Balzo! What treasures of sighing waters, dancing cascades, verdant glens, sombre pine woods, fair lawns thick sown with Alpine flowers, moss, and ferns, basaltic backgrounds, yawning gulfs, and mountain paths exquisite in lonely beauty, covering, as with a slight glaze, a hidden world of subterranean fire! and such a world! grim-Satanic, awe-struck, terrible with the crashing of earth's pillars, and black with the reflex of extinct flames; a world of thunder-roar, earthquake, whirlwind, and avalanche; birth of a thousand deaths, germ of an infinite variety of life, cut off and annihilated!

But one day ago I had passed through that mysterious region—looked down into those bottomless chasms, and lingered on the ledge of volcanoes; and now where are they?

I have seen Etna all round—on the eastern side from Calabria, on the south from Catania and its plain, and from Syracuse like a monstrous cloud, but nowhere is it so stupendous as at Maniace.

That Etna should therefore, like King Charles's head in Dickens' story, mix itself up with our daily life, is not astonishing.

If we have a nightmare, it is Etna!

If, at dinner-time, it is announced that the cone is visible, we all rush from the table, fling open the windows, and stare at it with eyes and opera-glasses. If the moon shines clear on it at night, still greater excitement! Conducted by the courier, Mr. Curzon—dress-coat, watch and chain, and quite the gentleman, who also, like Etna, mixes himself up in all our life and doings, and escorted by a bevy of dogs, we all tumble over each other downstairs, and precipitate ourselves outside. If Etna condescends to show itself continuously for many hours, we seize on chairs and benches under the tuft of trees in front of the house, and sit gazing.

If it veils its head in cloud and mist, as is too often the case, we are miserable. Her Grace goes to a certain window in the dining-room every five minutes to report progress. Mr. Curzon fidgets in and out incessantly, always closing the door with a bang, while Alec and the Signor Duca discuss the chances of lifting clouds and currents of wind.

At Maniace life is a blank without Etna. One March day, after much bad weather and consequent disappearance of the Presiding Deity, when the sun did come out, turning the cone into marvellous crystallization of a seraphic white-

ness, we all saluted each other in a burst of ecstasy.

As in the East, at break of day, the word is passed round, "Rejoice; it is Easter!" so we pass round the word—A—— to K——, Mr. Curzon to the Signor Duca, for once caught napping over the *Times*, Alec generally, and the servants to each other, "Rejoice, there is Etna!"

Even in continuous snow and hail, rain and fog, the fact of its sublime presence cannot be overlooked. There it is, like destiny, dominating the storm-clouds.

The long, low, many-windowed house, with a fine old Norman church and Norman outbuildings attached, lies chill and grey, under the shadow of green downs, and rushing waters, dashing over mossy stones, sing everlasting melodies to the moated walls.

Behind there is the old convent-garden, where tulips and hyacinths, violets and daffodils, snowdrops and Turk's-head, crowd into beds of antique patterns. The trees, mulberry and walnut, with big bare limbs, are much exercised by the wind. A donkey is tethered under one of them, on a bit of grass, hee-hawing agreeably.

Gru's kennel is attached to another tree, and Gru is solacing himself with barking.

In the centre there is a worm-eaten quadrant,

rising out of lavender and herbs; four little fountains are trickling at the four corners, very chary of water, and lilacs and guelder roses shut in the whole. Behind there are a bake-house, a wash-house, and a wood-house, to all of which I am conducted by her active Grace.

Maniace is at the confluence of many rivers. One of them is the Simeto, on which lies Centorbi, a Siculian centre of Ducetius.

Each river open out chains of green rounded heights, and each height divides itself into long lines of green valleys, sad and silent as the grave. Through these I walk with the Signor Duca, amongst weeds and stones and mossy grass. Afar, on the summits, are ancient oak-forests, dimly visible, and, here and there, a dolomitic crag uprises, as if in mockery of the level green.

What scenes of idyllic loveliness these untrodden valleys hold, who can say? Only Etna, looking over into the heart of the earth's secrets, knows!

To me it all comes as a wilderness of primeval beauty—a sort of "no man's land," exquisitely attractive.

In one of my many walks among the valleys, the Signor Duca points out to me a dark isolated rock beside a river-bank.

"That," says he, "is called the 'Saracen's Rock;' and there was gained a famous victory. We take our name from that spot, the site of a Byzantine city."

The mention of a city brings me to General George Maniace.

On this very spot, eight miles from Bronte, where stands that huge splintered rock beside the river, about a mile from the house proper, General George beat the Saracens, and founded a city, named after himself.

It was in the eleventh century, Leo the Philosopher, and, later, Michael Palæologus, reigning at Constantinople; and Sicily become a Byzantine province.

Belisarius had been fighting here, and afterwards Narses—both trying their hand against the omnipotent Goths.

Now it is the Saracens. General George was a very famous soldier, although the British public know nothing more of him than as a castle at Syracuse and a house appendage to an English peerage.

To me he is interesting, as the first commander who seriously appreciated the nascent qualities of the Normans.

CHAPTER XVII.

The Duchess and Bino of the Lion Head.—"Baleno."—"Too Comfortable."—Walk to the Boschetto.

THE murderer is back in his farm. Alec has sent for the Guardia publicha (police) from Bronte. We can see him—not Alec—but the murderer: a dark figure, going in and out of his door, on a tract of moorland under the shadow of the Balzo. He shares our attention all the morning with Etna. We have been studying both at intervals with opera-glasses, out of the dining-room window.

It is very cold to-day; everything sparkling like sugar crystals, under a steely sun. Furiosa is in her tempers—shut up in her room with a large brazier of charcoal.

After calling to her many times to come and dress me, and indeed running down the long corridor in a dishevelled condition to batter at

her door, she emerges at last, prepared for battle.

I can do nothing all the morning but watch the Duchess in the garden, in her waterproof. Now she is thrashing Gru for killing a drake. Bino of the lion head—Alec's pet—meanwhile attacks the tethered donkey, and is mauling him in style. In an instant her Grace turns on Bino, while R——, with her large black eyes and upturned face, her graceful coaxing ways, and womanly form, is pleading for both the dogs.

But R—— pleads in vain.

The Duchess is inexorable as fate. Condign punishment is administered by herself on Bino, assisted by Mr. Curzon, metamorphosed for the time being into a Sicilian peasant, in attendance on the Duke, just arrived from the carpenter's shed.

I am invited by the young ladies to drive. But on the appearance of a black horse, called Baleno (Lightning), harnessed to a basket-carriage, I vehemently declare that "I prefer walking." It is quite true. I prefer walking at all times—and now!

Fancy the hippogriff, on whose back Rinaldo rode to the moon, in harness, and you have Baleno!

He inaugurates his appearance by rising on

his hind legs, and pawing in the air; then he kicks, bounds, and plunges.

A campiere in uniform, who drives him from the stable, winks at me, and whispers, "*Capriccioso, ma buono.*" I reply, without the wink, "*Demonio!*"

The Duchess, in her waterproof, looks on quite composedly. The sweet young ladies prepare to get into the carriage, during a partial cessation of kicks and bounds. A——, I see, is to drive; R—— to sit beside her; the campiere to perch behind and intervene in case of danger.

"Good God! Duchess, do you mean to say the girls are going out with that fearful animal!"

I feel that a look of horror is on my face. The Duchess bursts into her merry laugh, echoed by A—— and R——. (A—— is now oscillating on the seat; the other sister holding on, and not yet able to put her foot on the step.) Imaginary flies seem at this moment to drive Baleno mad. He is tossing his head wildly from side to side, and switching his tail. Very imaginary flies indeed! It is so cold that I am clapping my hands together to keep them warm, while I stand staring. I never do anything else at Maniace but stare.

Now A—— has the reins in hand. Brave girl! R——, her petticoats a mass of mud, is beside her; both are quite unmoved and smiling at me. The Duchess, surrounded by dogs, smiles also. The campiere vaults into his seat behind, like an acrobat. A rear, a bound, a dash, and they rattle through the portone, and fly, rather than gallop, up the only road to the Balzo.

"How can you?" I ask, gazing reproachfully at the Duchess, then at the fading prospective of the girls, already quite small in the distance.

"Lord, my dear! What a fool you are! We drive out with Baleno every day. I have stayed at home for you. Don't talk nonsense!"

"Nonsense! Hum! If I hear," — etc., etc.

Exeunt into the garden. Duchess laughing, surrounded by dogs barking, myself wearing a serious visage.

Scene changes. The garden.

The Signor Duca—very tall, upright, and handsome—striding up and down among the flower-borders, in company with his son Alec, discoursing eloquently about the stone-crusher —a machine newly imported from England.

Scene closes.

Night approaches. Dinner (and what a good one!)—and to bed. Scene opens.

Etna throned in amazing majesty. Much snow has fallen; and its flanks are blazing white down to the Balzo. Nothing to distract the eye—nothing to confuse the brain, nothing to hinder infinite contemplation! There are some dark far-off stains near the crater, as if Typhon had escaped, and these were his footsteps.

We all spend the entire morning under the dazzling splendour of "the Presence."

In the house it is dark and chill, spite of huge wood fires, and pretty graceful R—— hovering about; and Alec occasionally refreshing us with the sight of his slim legs and neat knickerbockers.

I feel I eat too much, and I resolve to reform; but every time I sit down I break my resolution. The cuisine is so good, and I am so hungry!

It is a well-furnished board. The Signor Duca does the honours gracefully; the Duchess picks like a bird, and laughs and talks. The young ladies, as sweet as flowers in May, have delicate appetites; and Alec—well, I cannot put down in print all I think of Alec.

The only discord is Alec's French wine grower, or sub-factor, who, through the kindness of her Grace, is admitted. This man is coarse, contradictory, and ill-dressed. The ducal pair, perfect in the simplicity of their high breeding, inspire him with no respect whatever. They are too good-hearted to assert themselves, especially with inferiors.

"Signor X——," says charming R——, twisting her piquant mouth into a *moue*, and pointing to the tall, obnoxious figure retreating through the hall. "Signor X—— is Signor X——. Fortunately no one is, or can be, like him. He is utterly without tact."

"Utterly," I reply; "and very impertinent."

"You think so," joins in Alec. "But he has his good qualities all the same. In the office I keep him in order. When alone with me Signor X—— is as well drilled as Bino."

(I may add, *en passant*, "that Bino is anything but well drilled," spite of the Duchess's flagellations.)

"Goodness! don't talk so loud," whispers R——, "X—— is on the stairs. He may hear you."

"Why does not the Duke snub him?" I inquire.

"My father likes a quiet life," returns Alec.

"Soldiers always do at home, you know. And my mother is too amiable."

At this moment the obnoxious individual becomes visible from the window, amongst the masses of purple violets, red tulips, and sceptres of pink and white hyacinths, scurrying up and down the trim, box-edged walks, a cigar in his mouth, like a spirit in torture. Straightway the flowers hang their dewy heads as though oppressed; the birds fly low, over his billy-cock hat, chirping and twittering to peck at him if they can; and the donkey, chained on a grass-plot, under the great mulberry tree in the midst, lifts up his head and brays.

After lunch we take a long walk to the Boschetto; the Duke mounted on a very small donkey, his feet touching the ground; Alec brandishing my shawl like a star-spangled banner in the breeze; R—— showing her well-turned ankles in the neatest of walking-boots; and I—I tear a flounce early in the entertainment, and have to hold it up, also my dress, and a pair of goloshes which hurt me, *I* am laden like a pack-horse, and *wretched!*

We have to look to every step, it is so muddy. The great smooth green mountains lie around. In their midst is the grey old Monastery and the venerable Norman church. The roar of

many waters is in our ears; and Etna—no, I will *not* say one word more about Etna!

"We leap across streamlets, vault over puddles from stone to stone, run up and down rotten banks, and slide upon black mud, the Signor Duca riding on serenely in front, attended by two campieri, and followed by Mr. Curzon, in a mixed theatrical costume of a highland character.

Conversation under these circumstances is circumscribed, especially as Bino (of the lion head) occupies the entire attention of the gentlemen.

With the utmost difficulty they prevent the sudden massacre of two donkeys, a red cow, and a most innocent calf, reposing on the grass; likewise of a neighbouring dog, of a peculiarly humble and retiring turn of mind.

This kind of tournament continues, until I come to look on Bino as a criminal of the most sanguinary type.

At last we reach the gate of the Boschetto —an open wood of scathed, wind-tormented oaks.

Here we come upon one of the Duke's new roads (this winter alone he has made four miles of new roads to open up the mountains), a mass of sharp piled-up stones, along which we pass in a series of gymnastics.

We drop the Duke at the stone-breakers—six old men in a row, all rap, rap, rapping.

He, dismounting from his donkey, takes off his coat and joins them. Mr. Curzon at the same instant disencumbering himself also of his elegant black velvet jacket.

As an "Idle Woman" I have seen many strange sights in my life, but never so strange a one as a courier breaking stones!

That *is* a rarity! A Duke will do a great deal on his own land—especially an enthusiastic road-maker and farmer—but a courier!

Anyhow, Curzon hit away with a will. We left them all at it, assisted by three boys, with skins like Red Indians, carrying three baskets; the Duke's small donkey reposing meekly on the grass, knowing that he is in for it, and willing to take it easy—as to his battered legs.

On we go, following Alec over the abominable stones, by the venerable oaks of the Boschetto. Etna (no, I won't—only really it is lovely) glistening behind us in the paleness of a spring sunset; on, until I thought the Boschetto had miraculously extended itself like the widow's cruse of oil.

Alec and R—— are used to new-laid roads; so, apparently, is Bino, rampaging about among perpetual donkeys, only escaping death by a

vigorous application of Alec's stick; and pigs who scud off with Bino's fangs at their throat—Alec, on his long legs, giving chase, until the scene forms quite a tableau—donkeys, pigs, and Bino, with Alec in the centre, triumphing like St. Michael, and laying all his opponents in the dust!

CHAPTER XVIII.

A Picnic.—The Start.—Scenery.—A Courier Equestrian.—A Rural Tragedy and Superstition.—Otaheite.—The Summit.—Back again with the Dogs.—Mr. Curzon everywhere.

PICNIC got up in my honour! *Dramatis personæ* present at the start:—

Etna, four mules, and several stray donkeys; a campiere, armed to the teeth; a basket of provisions; another French vine-grower, introduced by Alec—friend of Signor X——; Madame, j'ai l'honneur de, etc., etc.; cocks, hens, dogs; a crowd of mules ready saddled and bridled; Alec in knickerbockers; two strange men with whom he is bargaining about timber (one with a fur cap and tartan shawl, the other dirty and ragged. Loud talking indicates that Alec is disgusted and angry); the English carpenter; Mr. Hodder, newly imported with engines from England; (Hodder's wife "wishes she were a fairy," and could fly

to Maniace! If you could only see the sodden, matter-of-fact face and figure of Hodder, you might realize what sort of "fairy" Mrs. Hodder would be likely to make); two painted carts, gorgeous in colour; a glorious sunshine; the Signor Duca shouldering an opera-glass; his own particular small donkey. (Let the Duke break stones, or ride a small donkey as much as he likes, he is always *the* Duke—the finished gentleman, the polished courtier; and so Mr. Curzon thinks, as he comes out of the portone behind him, imitating him in fancy clothes.) To these, Enter the Duchess in a rather Meg Merrilees hat, with red poppies (Her Grace lends herself rather better to the occasion than her consort with his aristocratic clothes, and perfect boots and gaiters); Charming R——, as fresh as fresh can be, in a black hat and feathers; A—— ditto; myself a blank, but satisfied with my appearance; Retainers, Campieri, Servants, several Ladiesmaids, chastely elegant, grouped about in attitudes; Furiosa, two shawls on her head, looking askance, out of a window; a Cook, all in white, like a ghost; a ragged Colt, and several Beggars.

Amid the roar of waters, the braying of mules, the cackling of fowls, the screech of peahens, and the barking of dogs, we are off, a

long cavalcade, riding singly—Indian file, on mules. Over one boiling river, crossed by a wooden bridge; then turn to the right across another, and, further on, a third river, white with foam.

The round green mountains we are to scale rise before us. The air is calm. There is a great silence. The colour as of a desolate nature all around. Not trimmed and dressed, but primeval, archaic—nature as it got itself out of the ark, purified by the waters.

The crown of the mountains before us are fringed with dark lines of wood. Those are the oak forests—as old perhaps as the Saracens—Druid-like trees, to cut down which is the scope of the Duke's road on which we are travelling.

For are not the aged trees spoiling? And are not the wide valleys which stretch upwards, each watered by its foaming river, to be garlanded by luxurious grapes? — the grapes which, by the energy of Alec and the rude Frenchman, are to make the good Bronte wine?

All this is clearer to me; and I admire the blank loveliness and green solitudes of the intertwining heights the more, because my back is to Etna. No one can do justice to

a scene with Etna dazzling the eyes, as from Maniace.

Our road, like that of the Boschetto, all stones,—it grows rougher and rougher as we ascend (the stone-crusher can only do its work by degrees). We can come to no harm, for the bridle of each mule is held by a campiere, and Alec, with his blue eyes everywhere, is walking.

To the Signor Duca the road is much more beautiful than the mountains. It is his own work, four miles long, and it will bring down riches from the summits.

When the Duke came to Maniace there was no road but that perilous one which brought me there. Now they are winding all about. No wonder that to him roads are beautiful, and that he is proud of them!

On strides Alec up-hill, and we follow silently.

Alec is so young, and merry, and boyish, yet so wise and kind withal, and with such a talent for taking care of every one, he always takes the lead!

Bino bounds on the green turf, ready to commit any number of crimes *en route*. Bino and Martino, an ugly terrier, and little Gru, the soul of mischief, both conscious that the Duchess cannot admonish them.

Mr. Curzon, in blue spectacles (that touch of

refinement is perfect) rides a very lively roan cob, which carracoles among the stones, and gives him a world of trouble.

Even when that roan is quiet, he rounds his neck and champs his bit like a war-horse. In a general way he kicks and rears, and occasionally bolts, carrying Mr. Curzon and his blue spectacles into such remote distances that he becomes a mere silhouette against the sky. Sometimes the roan stands stock still, like the marble horse of the Commendatore in "Don Giovanni," or sways himself up and down as does a rocking-horse, until poor Curzon is purple in the face.

The roan and his rider are the success of the day.

The Duke and Alec follow them ceaselessly with their eyes, making signs to each other. The Duchess, less cautious, laughs outright, especially at the rocking-horse business, which does put poor blue-spectacled Curzon, well defined on the edge of a cliff, *au dernier ridicule.*

Alec, biting his lips vigorously, not to explode before all the men, whispers to me:—"That Curzon gave himself out as being very horsey, and begged for 'an animal with some go in him, you know, Mr. Alec—something lively.'"

(At this moment the roan [not Mr. Curzon,

for he has no command of him], after one of his mountain excursions, pounds down recklessly upon the young ladies, causing A—— to scream, the Duke to utter something like an oath, and Alec to rush into the *mêlée.*)

"And the beggar don't ride three parts badly," says Alec, returning to my side after restoring order. "That roan is a stiff one out on the hills, let me tell you. I gave it to him on purpose, and he sticks to his saddle like a man!"

We rise and rise by the long zigzags of the new road. We look back on the crests of the hills, descending in long lines to the lonely valleys, and we gaze down into their silent bosoms (a sort of sacrilege in that majestic solitude). We behold the five rivers that meet and foam about the monastery of Maniace, and raise our eyes to ancient oak-forests fringing the heights.

We are in another world up here, quite near the sky—a fair, clear world, in which the light is born. The swallows dart hither and thither, low on the downs, affrighted at our presence. The crows wheel round in circles overhead, cawing loudly. The delicate green of the young wheat on the cultivated patches, and the fine sprouts of the grass, seem trembling with life. Dew shines on the leaves of every delicate way-

side plant; spurge and fennel, acanthus and thistles, mere weeds, are sparkling in the sunshine; the hills cast long shadows into the valleys; and the white flowers of the beans scent the fresh breeze.

A sense of immensity overwhelms me. Etna rises behind, encircled by its white crown of satellite volcanoes, quivering in fields of light. But Etna, beside the sweetness of idyllic nature, wakes no sympathetic chord. In that pastoral paradise it comes like a blanched image of death, dominating a green and living life.

Naturally the new road does not grow smoother as we advance. New things always are best at first; witness marriage, houses, bargains, and friendships.

We cross mountain torrents, over which Gru has to be carried on the Duchess' saddle-bow, and landslips, over which Bino bolts and Alec sighs, for it is all fresh toil and trouble to the dear fellow.

Then we arrive at a steep incline, where the mountain-tops and oak forests are at hand-shaking distance; next, to a clayey bank, where a sudden chill seizes us.

Beside this bank, embedded in a heap of fresh-cut stones, stands a disabled stone-crusher, with one wheel missing.

A silence falls on all. Alec and R——, who have been chaffing, become suddenly mute.

Checco, the guard in uniform, who is riding on in front with provisions for our picnic, and who has been throwing stones for Bino to crack (failing any living game, a stone suits Bino), suddenly bows his head, uncovers, and crosses himself.

The Signor Duca raises his hat also, and Alec's pleasant eyes cloud with tears.

All the men in passing reverently uncover and cross themselves. A horrible gloom seems to float in between us and the disabled engine, as the shadow of that clayey bank falls.

I turn to Alec for an explanation.

"Ah, it was a sad business!" says Alec, with a sigh, speaking low.

"My father was so pleased, and we were getting on so nicely with the road. The engine was first-rate. I drove it myself up Etna side here, from Piedimonte, forty miles, and a tough job I had! Three days on the road, and little time to sleep, and less to eat. And I was proud of it, and proud of the work I had done to show my father, when last week, while Beppo and the boy were filling, and Salvatore stood behind spreading the stones half of the

iron tyre of one wheel flew off, and struck him dead.

"Poor Salvatore! he was a first-rate workman; I suppose it was a flaw in the iron.

"I attended the funeral as chief mourner.

"But the Sicilians will never work at that stone-crusher again. Nothing will persuade them that it was a simple accident; '*they see further*,' they say. What can you do? Heigh-ho! So we must finish this new road by hand, and a fine time we shall have of it."

After this nothing but Bino's antics can raise our spirits. In the absence of donkeys he is careering after crows, in the young wheat, a harmless occupation.

A—— is found to be seated on her horse's tail, and has to descend and have her saddle adjusted; and Mr. Curzon, with his blue spectacles, is discovered at a distant point, his fiery roan upright on her hind legs, over the brink of a precipice.

The Duchess is silent, and keeps well ahead. The poppies in her hat bob up and down. My mule, Giulia, and the campiere in a new suit of embroidered cloth, who leads her, are both so steady that I cannot get up the ghost of a fear.

We draw rein at a brick hut called

"Otaheite," because the men from Maletto, who work there, live in round, mud wigwams, with smoke pouring out of the doors.

We exchange compliments with the swarthy men of Maletto: "How goes it?" "What's doing?"

Then with each other: "Are you cold? tired? hungry? How grand it is! Superb! What a brick Curzon is!" (He has returned to us now, with the air of a conqueror, his roan reeking.)

The general result of inquiries is, that we are all, including the men from Maletto, crowding round our mules and staring their black eyes out of their heads, well and hearty; also red in the face with the chill mountain air blowing off Etna. Only we are dying of hunger. But no one dares to say so, because, even on mountain-tops and amid virgin forests and upon overhanging precipices, we are creatures of convention; and in company with dukes and duchesses, however condescending, one must not betray vulgar appetites.

The Signor Duca is building a large engine-house up here, and making a deep well, and doing all kinds of tiresome things. So we have to dismount, and wade through liquid mud and slush to admire them.

I use superlatives to get over it the faster. R—— pouts her pretty red lips and flashes her eyes. (R—— has the effect to me as of a goddess bidden to a feast with no god to meet her.)

What are stone-crushers, and engine-houses, and Etna, Mr. Curzon in blue spectacles, five rivers thundering to the sea, and picnics on mountain-tops, to a brilliant London belle?

Yet she bears it cheerfully, does R——, and smiles like an angel.

Alec strides about, explaining everything to the Signor Duca and to his mother. The workmen, covered with red mud, crowd round and kiss hands; then stand back, their rough caps off, and their shaggy manes of hair blowing in the wind, until the Duke, touching his hat with that true instinct of good breeding which made Louis XIV. bow to his housemaid, begs of them to "be covered." Upon which the excellent dark-skinned creatures, all teeth and eyes and broad grins, murmur, "Benedica Eccellenza," and retire.

How they work, these Sicilians, with the eyes of the Duke upon them, rolling Cyclopean rocks up and down, thumping the sides of stolid oxen, and drawing wooden cradles, laden with stones, through the mud!

In the meanwhile, "we others" are wending our way on foot to further altitudes, towards a plot of fresh green turf, under the riven face of a stone quarry. An agreeable prospect occupies the foreground.

Mr. Curzon, on his knees, without his blue spectacles (though the wind is blinding, and wrenches us about as if it resented our invasion of its legitimate domain on the mountain-tops)—Mr. Curzon, I say, on his knees upon a white tablecloth, his head immersed in hampers and baskets, sandwich-papers flying about him like kite-signals, and an army of black bottles around, portentous to behold, is arranging our lunch! Blessed sight!

The campieri, in uniform, are rolling down great blocks of stone to serve as seats.

Seats! What, here? On a bleak mountain-side! By Heaven! I had pictured to myself a sheltered nook within friendly walls, knit together by ivy, vine, and oleander—a nook tipped with golden lichen and dainty parasites of echeveria and stonecrop—a nook, a cave perhaps, deep in the shelter of the oakforest! And here! three thousand feet over Maniace, not a coign of shelter, with Etna for a background, and all the winds of Æolus for neighbours!

I am trembling with cold inside and out. I

say nothing, not even to A——, who, blue in the face, I am sure, feels much as I do.

If I *must* sit and eat in a hurricane, well: it is all in the day's work; but I don't *prefer* a sore throat, or a lumbago, or perhaps a fever.

I cannot join in heartily when the Duchess, with her cheery laugh, says: "It is glorious to lunch in face of such a prospect!" and the Signor Duca, rubbing his hands, echoes her.

Then they both seat themselves on two flat stones, and instantly become helpless victims to a tornado.

Meanwhile, Mr. Curzon's incantations (including kicks all round to the dogs, and muttered oaths at the campieri) have produced no end of good things—cold jellied beef, out of a case, juicy and trembling, hams, fowls, pâtés, cakes, and wine.

When I cannot help it, I sit down too. When I have my plate full I can bear the wind and cold better.

The Duke, brandishing his silver horn full of rich Maniace wine, rises, and is about to drink a *brindisi* to the new road, when the thoughtful Alec stops him.

"Salvatore was only killed last week, father," he whispers, "and the widow and the little children ——"

"Right, my boy," says the Signor Duca, tossing off his horn in silence, "I forgot——"

How we eat! I don't think I ever enjoyed a meal so much in all my life. My back is turned to the keen wind, and to A—— and R——, who kindly forgive me.

Between the courses the mules and Mr. Curzon's roan, tethered to the outstanding oaks, neigh and prance, the Duke's donkey hee-haws, and the men, six in number, with long muskets —everybody is armed, and always goes about armed; for although this is the province of Messina, and considered safe, yet Sicily is a land of brigands—are stretched on the ground full length, waiting for their turn to eat, and singing choruses in a sad minor key—the wind bearing off the notes, in a wild, random way, God knows where; perhaps to Vulcan or Enceladus.

In these strange latitudes, who can tell what becomes of stray voices? Only let us hope Enceladus may not hear them, and turn upon his side, for that would mean an earthquake!

We eat and we eat; the wind blows and it blows. Bino, raising his lion head, barks, and feeling inaction fanciful, attacks the heels of Mr. Curzon's roan, causing the downfall of piles of plates and the overturning of cruets.

The Duke grumbles to Alec about that "confounded beast" (I am not sure the Duke did not use a stronger word), and Alec answers, "Bino is no worse than the others—only bigger and stronger. Martino is just as spiteful; and Gru a little devil."

A family dispute ensues. The Signor Duca says, "Bino must be muzzled." Alec replies, "It is cruel." And so on.

Then we all settle down again to our plates. Mr. Curzon, like the Genius of Plenty, dispensing more food out of more flying papers of cakes and sandwiches.

Will the picnic ever end? A question.

The sun comes out; and what with Bordeaux and Maniace wine, I am as warm as a toast, and I can now turn round on my stone seat and look at R——, always a pleasant object for eyes to fall on; only it is a Barmacide feast to her, poor girl, as I tell her, and she smiles acquiescence.

At last Mr. Curzon, when the frenzy for serving us has abated (he has let no one else touch anything, but done it all with his own hands), replaces his spectacles.

He can persuade us to eat no more!

"One leetle slice more, your Grace. Now, Lady R——, just dees one tart." (For I have

forgotten to say that for reasons of his own, Curzon—as honest a Briton as ever wore shoe leather — affects a German accent.) "Zee! look—zo good—zee be di laast. Mr. Alec, von coop more vines."

"No—no—no, Curzon," a chorus runs all round. "Nothing more."

We rise; leaving the scraps to the excellent Curzon, and to the Sicilians; who, as far as I can see, do nothing but drink out of a barrel. Let us hope it is from a spring!

As we have nothing to do, we stroll vaguely about in the cold sunshine, among the fine old oaks; slipping up and down rocks, and stepping inopportunely into holes, when we scream and jump—sometimes on thorn-bushes, when we scream again.

As to the view, we have long ago said everything possible about it.

So, by common consent, the view is tabooed. Not even her Grace expatiates on it any more.

I distinctly declare that I do not relish mountains. The ascent, the picnic over, all my old prejudices return. The wind cannot be said to have returned, as it has never been away; only while I was eating I did not heed it.

Now, it becomes to me a violent and pertinacious enemy, getting very much the better of me.

In an incredibly short time Mr. Curzon has eaten, repacked everything in hampers, and mounted the ladies. When he himself succeeds in vaulting into the saddle, his lively roan strikes out so fiercely on all sides, that everyone avoids him.

I am to walk down with the Duke and Alec. We begin by the road; but, like the dogs, soon take to short cuts, very rough, and moist with landslips.

The rest file down solemnly, one by one showing dark and gaunt against a grey sky.

Bino varies the monotony by unearthing a pig. Martino goes at the pig first, then Bino follows. Then the pig—audacious creature!—faces Bino, who, in face of this provocation, flies upon it tooth and nail.

Oh! the squeaking and the howling; the cries, the curses, and the kicks!

The Duke rushes upon Bino. Alec belabours him with a stick; the campiere kicks him. In vain! Bino—his red and black mane all afloat—his eyes glaring like fire-coals, sticks to the pig.

What a scene in the high wind!

At last Bino is beaten off, and stoned ignominiously down hill. The Signor Duca declaring, and this time with a frown, "That that beast must have a muzzle or be shot."

"Yes, father," answers Alec, meekly.

Meanwhile escaped piggie rushes up a bank, squeaking dismally, into the shelter of some hole, known to himself, and is seen no more.

Nor is Bino; nor is Mr. Curzon, save in the very far distance, combating with his horse —a silhouette as before.

So, at last, down we are again, at the river, which crosses the new road. And Maniace is close by; with its long lines of convent roof; its Norman-Gothic church, dark and imposing; its outbuildings, and its almond-trees, white with blossom.

At the Sambuco ford, Martino, who dashes in, is carried away by the current. As his tan head and glassy eyes float past, there is a cry, and a "Save him—save the poor dog!" from everybody. Upon which, Mr. Curzon, coming from no one knows where, like fate, dashes off his horse, seizes the reins, rushes into the river —the horse after him and — pulls Martino out.

Setting the frightened animal on his legs

upon the further bank, Mr. Curzon, his face flushed with the ardour of victory, turns round for applause. Alas! he does not obtain it.

The Duchess remarks coldly that Martino had much better have been left to his fate. He is a cur. No one wants him, and he is always getting Bino into scrapes. At which Mr. Curzon, much crestfallen, touches his hat, remounts his roan, and gallops on.

Here we are, back again on the wooden bridge, whence we had started in the morning, only with a difference. We are covered with Sicilian mud, and we have seen the mountains.

Close at home we find the English carpenter, Mr. Hodder, working on a beam with his chisel; and the idiot, Sanzio (who takes care of the poultry, and kills all the young chickens), beside him, astride on a newly-cut tree.

Sanzio lost his mother yesterday; and when the melancholy fact, with much caution, was announced to him, replied "*Tanto meglio.*" So not even the good-natured Duchess can make anything of him, though she does knit him a pair of red muffitees.

All the cocks and hens; the ducks and the pea-fowl; the campieri; the cook, in his snow-white cap, standing like a ghost in the portone; Furiosa, her head covered with shawls, leaning

out of the window, are just as we left them. To see them, one could fancy our picnic was a dream!

So now indoors to have a cup of tea and rest before dinner.

CHAPTER XIX.

Aci Castello.—The Seven Rocks.—Polyphemus and Ulysses.—Aci Reale.—Acis and Galatea.

HERE are two railway stations on the coast between Messina and Catania, named after the shepherd-boy Acis, Aci Reale, and Aci Castello. His spirit is also embodied in at least two streams, running down *terrified* to the sea.

Aci Castello is but a poor, brown-looking town on the shoulder of a hill; a ruined Norman round tower in the midst. Here nature sings no pæans of delight, as at Ali and Scaletta. That lava death which sets in after Piedimonte reigns supreme. A pall lies over the earth. Nothing but dreary skeletons of rocks, and streams as of basalt.

It is best to overlook the mean little town altogether, the red brick, sloping roofed station, at which we pause to take in water for the engine (perhaps from Acqua Grande, one

of Acis' streams), and to turn to the left towards the slumbering waters of the bay.

Is it not lovely? The rolling depths of a watery world, smooth as orient pearls and clear as chrysoprase; a world in which distance is not, nor proportion, only colour!

And that fragrant line of perfect shore singing to the harmonies of the sea! What tints! What masses of colour! Acres of blue and white lupins, fields of marigolds, rosy sea-pinks clothing the rocks, delicious yellowness of citron and mimosa; fierce-eyed genista peeping out of rocks, brilliant young grass. A carpet fresh from nature's loom, sown with oxalis, bee-orchis, gentian, pimpernel, and moon-daisies, mixed up with the blackness of lava-streams.

On one side of Aci, seven basalt rocks rise out of the calm blue sea, following each other in a regular irregularity. These are the Scopuli Cyclopum which blinded Polyphemus hurled after Ulysses as he was putting off to sea.

The first rock, a short distance from the beach, called Isola d'Aci, is flat and wreathed with a few brown vine leaves, an olive or two, and plants of spurge and fennel. A cave on one side, reached by some steps cut in the

rock, is called the *Grotta dei Ciclopi.* But this dreary hole does not at all correspond with Homer's cheerful description of Polyphemus' cavern, shrouded by groves and woods.

The six other rocks rise bare and pointed from the sea; diminishing in size as they recede; the last, but a little one, an afterthought, as it were, of spiteful Polyphemus.

Polyphemus and the Cyclops must not be confounded with the Titans—heaven-born warriors, sons of earth and sky and own brothers to Saturn, who, for their rebellion against Jupiter, are bound within the fiery caves of Etna from the dawn of time.

The Cyclops neither fought, nor ploughed, nor sowed, nor, although Neptune's sons, were they seafaring, or possessed of any sea craft. Simply they lived apart, dispersed in caves and holes on Etna's side, tenders of sheep, milkers of herds, and makers of cheese; yet, not objecting to a meal of human flesh when it fell handy

Impious they are like the Titans, mockers of gods and scoffers of Jupiter, whose thunder, forged at hand in Vulcan's workshop, they thoroughly despised.

Polyphemus is their king, of bulk so great, that his head towers over them all, as Etna's

cone towers over its clustered crown of lesser craters. His one eye is but the poetic necessity of the one volcanic blaze.

His roars, the rumble of the earthquake; his heavy footsteps, the crushing of the storm; his uplifted arm, the thunderbolt that falls. Whether Polyphemus be made for Etna, or Etna for Polyphemus, who can tell?

At least, each theory harmonizes with the other; they are poetically one.

Familiar as it is, one loves to recall Ulysses' adventures with the Cyclops.

One can imagine the wrath of Polyphemus, returning to find his cave occupied by the Trojan chief and his luckless crew, who had taken shelter there awhile, on their voyage from the land of the Lotophagi. And one pictures their dismay, when for all answer to the specious words of Ulysses, the monster seizes on two of their sailors, the plumpest and the reddest, and cracking all their bones within his jaws, bolts them outright.

But Ulysses reflects; he has plenty of time for reflection, for he and his comrades are shut up all day long while the Cyclops is away pasturing his flocks; only to return, however, and sup luxuriously on two or three more plump sailors.

"Cyclops," cries Ulysses, who has reflected to some purpose, "as human flesh seems so pleasant to you, let me offer you a draught of human wine to wash it down."

As the liquor flows down his throat, the delighted monster grunts with savage glee.

"This is no mortal juice," he cries; "but nectar stolen from heaven; give me more!"

Then, turning to Ulysses, "I promise you, Trojan stranger, that for this good wine I will devour you last of all."

When Ulysses once forms his plans, the issue is seldom doubtful.

One can almost anticipate what follows; how, while the giant sleeps, overcome by the fumes of the wine, Ulysses bores out his one eye with the stake he has so carefully made red-hot beforehand.

And how the yells of the blinded wretch echo uselessly round the cave, as he gropes about trying to clutch Ulysses.

And lastly, how, standing mournfully at the mouth of his cave to let his flock out, but keep the strangers in, he misses his prey after all.

For Ulysses and his crew have passed out, under his hands, bound by withy bands beneath the bodies of those very sheep!

Of little avail is it that Polyphemus rushes

after them and hurls rock after rock into the sea, whence comes the voice of Ulysses, taunting him from the ship.

It is too late now; Ulysses sails away unscathed, and the seven rocks forming the strange line before me settle into their places amid the waves.

This throwing about of rocks by the Cyclops has a double moral. Polyphemus, apart from his personal adventures with Galatea and Ulysses, prefigures the earthquakes that upheave Etna's sides.

The rocks flung at Acis and Ulysses are but a combustion of nature on this volcanic shore.

The Greek myths are always faithful to local tradition.

Looking, as I do now, at this heaped-up coast of lava barriers, loose stones and gigantic boulders, all black as Erebus, I feel this instinctively without any process of reasoning.

Similar in its meaning of fabled detail is the myth of Enceladus — a Titan, or Typhon, brother of Jupiter, bound under his earthly throne on Etna.

The roars of the mountain are the Typhon's groans; the flames and smoke his breath; and when he turns upon his fiery bed, earthquakes shake the world.

Prometheus, lying bound outside Caucasus, was delivered by Hercules, but the torment of Enceladus, in the throes of the volcano, knows no rest nor end.

With Vulcan, God of Fire, who plies his hammer within the crater to forge the bolts of Jove, we have the thunders of the mountain.

It is curious to note how all the myths of Etna group themselves round Jupiter. In the mythologic division of Trinacria, Himera on the north was Minerva's portion; Diana possessed Ortygia in the south; Demeter and Proserpine, the plains of Catania and the mountain of Enna; and Zeus, the great fire-dome, dominating all.

Either as prison or work-shop, flame-crowned throne or forest wilderness, loved by the maiden goddesses, his daughters, Etna is altogether Jove's.

Next to the station of Aci Castello is the pretty town of Aci Reale.

Here we are well out of the lava-death. Lava, indeed, does crop up all along this coast; but here, the wealth of vegetation enshrouds it like flowers upon a bier.

Aci lies gleefully mapped out upon a smiling hill-side, decorated with white churches and

campanile, barocco palaces, and galleried houses, belted in mazes of oranges and blue-leaved olives.

Down at the station, level with the road, in the midst of fiacres, beggars, dust, railway whistles, and rumbling of trains, a native millionaire has built a magnificent hotel. The long rows of cheerful windows, cool behind their green shutters, look out on fig and fruit orchards nodding over high walls.

The hotel is, I believe, commodious, clean, and cheap.

Why did the native millionaire, with all that dazzling coast to choose from, select a site where there is nothing but walls to gaze on?

Here Acis was crushed by the rocks hurled on him by jealous Polyphemus, enamoured of the yellow-haired Nereid whom he loved; and here he was turned into a stream, as a merciful escape from death.

But the stream called Acqua Grande is not at all the Fiume Freddo I had passed on my way to Maniace, so here we have a direct divergence of poetic origins.

As there are many Aci, so there are many streams, all born among the lava borders of Etna, and all running down *terrified* to the sea.

Galatea was a sea-nymph of that golden strand. A creature of flowing locks, entwined with tangling sea-weed, shells, and coral-spray bathing her amber head and round white limbs amid the foamy waters of the sandy bay.

"The loves" of Acis and Galatea were just below the modern town, which is spread out upon the hills, over lava caves and grottoes.

Loves of the woods and fields, pastoral and out-of-doors, under the canopy of the blue heavens or on the glittering sands.

The giant Polyphemus loved Galatea too; but she disdained his surly gambols and his leering eye, disdained him, and fled from him.

He, straying about the lava crests in search of her, looks down into a dell, and, oh! horror! beholds her and Acis together!

With a hideous roar he rends the solid rocks and flings them down on Acis.

This time he is not blind, and his hand is sure. Acis is crushed.

Changed into a stream, he flies in rapid bounds down to the sea.

Galatea dissolves into a fountain, which in ever-murmuring sighs and tears of watery spray, laments for Acis' loss.

CHAPTER XX.

Catania, Classic and Mediæval.—Chiarissima or Ætnea?—Catania and the Athenian Expedition.—The Theatre.—Alcibiades' Oration.—The Campanians.—The Carthaginians at Catania.—Roman Catania.—Saracens and Normans.—The Hohenstaufens.

A SERIES of tunnels engulfs us after Aci Reale.

I am dazed by the rush and the darkness. The sweet air grows damp and chill. Deeper and deeper spreads the lava-death around, marked by bare scoriæ barriers (iron waves heaped up by rushing fires), miles of basalt walls, as through Phlegethonian fields; then with a screech, a trumpet-call and a whistle, we rush into the station of Catania.

From the moment I enter Catania and behold black houses, black roads, black flag-stones, black dust, black earth, a black harbour, and a black lava shore, I hate it.

And the much-vaunted climate!

Already I have caught a cold from the damp air. How can it be otherwise? Close under Etna (the great crater is but twenty miles distant, straight up, the rise begins, one may say, in the very streets of Catania) the most violent transitions are inevitable.

Whether the wind blows, or does *not* blow off the snowy dome of Etna, except for one month in the year, under normal circumstances, it is capped with snow—makes summer or winter. And then what fighting with Boreas and Æolus, and windy Harpies let loose through miles of straight, broad streets—Etna at one end, and the lava-bound seaboard at the other!

Lava and Etna! You can no more get away from either here than at Maniace. Etna, very bare and very ugly on this southern side, dominates Catania like a demon! No shelter! No escape! Freezing or grilling, as the ill-conditioned temper of the volcano may decree.

Freeman calls Catania "the iron-bound child of Ionic Naxos, created to do battle with Doric Syracuse;" and he wonders how it has ever survived the blows of Syracuse, on one hand, and the fire-deluge of Etna at the other. (The hostile states were very near each other. From the Grand Hotel of Catania you can see the

heights over the Bay of Agosta, flowing on towards the ridge of Hybla.)

What induced Hohenstaufen Frederic to christen Catania "Chiarissima" is quite beyond me.

Was it the glamour of her soft Greek name? I am not sure that that did not attract me also.

Yet who can predicate by what crack-jaw syllables Catania was known in the Sikel dialect before the Greeks came with their musical terminations, just as the Italians euphonise rough-sounding surnames and cities.

An excellent idea of Syracusan Hiero's to call Grecian Katane Ætnea. Cause and effect are not more indissolubly joined together than are the city and the mountain; but it was a strange freak to call himself Ætneas, and claim heroic honours, as though he were the veritable founder.

The whole thing was but a mere outburst of family vanity. Gelon, his elder brother, accepted heroic honours as founder of Syracuse, to which he had no right; and Hiero, not to be behind-hand, became Ætneas, accepting heroic honours also.

Hiero could boast that Attic Katane became under him a Doric city. An easy process, achieved neither by the sword nor conquest, but

simply by forcibly ejecting the Attic Greeks, and calling in Doric Greeks from Syracuse and Peloponnesus to take their place.

But with Hiero's death the exiles returned with Ducetius—and Catania, says Pindar, became as powerful a city as Carthage, and so Attic in temper that it entered into the Athenian war against Syracuse with a fury of partizanship which cost it dear.

Into the details of that great struggle, recorded by Thucydides, I cannot enter here, save as it touched Catania; at Catania it was that the first war-note was sounded.

In fact, but the flimsiest pretexts were needed to fan Athenian ambition in regard to Sicily. Insults by Dorians had been offered at Segeste and Leontini; and how should Ionic Athens, in the heyday of her power, refuse to interfere when solemnly called upon to do so?

And would Syracuse ever rest until it had subdued the whole island and the parent state also—Syracuse representing on fresh soil the eternal feud between Chalcydian Greeks and Dorians?

Besides, Athens longed passionately for Sicily—the seat of Jove, the home of her gods and demi-gods, the legend-land of her heroes, sung by her poets, chronicled by her his-

torians, and knit to her by alliances many and close.

So Alcibiades, with Nicias and Lamachus, comes sailing with his Athenian fleet into Sicilian waters, and with great longing looks upon the sea-walls and splendid harbour of Catania!

But Catania, worked upon by a remnant of Doric partizans, mans her walls, shuts up her harbour, and refuses to receive him!

"However," say the Catanians, to sweeten the refusal, "although we cannot admit the Athenians into our harbour, we will not refuse Alcibiades and the other generals an audience in the theatre, and hear what they may have to say."

This is in B.C. 415.

Imagine a black and very dingy stair, leading down to a still blacker and dingier hole, and you have before your eyes the ruins of the theatre at Catania, buried under ages of lava.

I went down as into eternal night. Certainly there was a torch carried by a "guardiano," but that only served to make darkness visible. The walls that open out at the bottom of the stairs, smutty in themselves, appear especially so, coming from the brilliant daylight outside.

There are eight flights of steps to descend, and thirty-three tiers of seats in the theatre, but

all so mangled and built over by foundations, that my conceptions were utterly confounded.

One portion, near what remains of the proscenium, I did distinctly understand—some square-cut recesses, lined with marble in the thickness of the wall, once serving as seats of honour.

Here I was called upon by the "guardiano" to observe that upon these square-cut seats, once lined with marble, sat Nicias and Lamachus; and that on that proscenium Alcibiades made his celebrated oration to the Catanians while the Athenian troops were treacherously possessing themselves of their city and harbour.

If I could only believe in that rugged bit of dark stage, how interesting it would be! But I cannot.

The stage on which Alcibiades trod has never survived so many earthquakes. The theatre was too lofty to be spared. Count Roger, also, despoiled it. We know that one pillar was stolen for a statue of St. Agatha, set up in a piazza, and what he took as materials for his new cathedral, it is impossible to say.

These are the ruins of a Roman theatre, erected probably on Grecian lines, but not in themselves Grecian.

While the Catanians dwelt upon the honeyed

phrases of the "curled darling's" lisping speech (we are told that in Alcibiades *a lisp* had an *especial charm*, and set off his eloquence), marked the charm of his splendid person, and statue-like purity of feature, his scented locks lying heavy on his brow; his gold-embroidered chlamyde, the badge of the old country sweeping behind him; breathing, as it were, the fragrance of the poetic atmosphere which surrounds him even to this day, the Athenian hoplites were quietly pulling down a little gate of a very sorry structure, and swarming within the walls; "which undertaking being completed," says Thucydides, with a caustic sense of humour, "Alcibiades ends his oration, and the Athenian fleet finds at Catania a proper anchorage for ships and men, in the war against Syracuse."

Could Catania but have foreseen! Had she but reflected! Hiero had loved her, but Dionysius hated her, and now, in revenge for the part she has taken against Syracuse he smites her as he smote Naxos. Though he is himself Greek, he gives Catania, bound hand and foot, to the Campanians, nor is she ever Greek again, except nominally under the Eastern emperors.

Once again was Catania and her harbour an object of eager envy, in that contest which

almost gave Sicily to the fierce Carthaginian. Terrible was the naval battle in which Leptines, brother of Dionysius, was defeated with twenty thousand men before the onset of the Carthaginian admiral, Magon.

And all the while Etna, in full eruption overhead, barring the way of Himilcon, coming by land to support Magon!

This is the historical eruption of B.C. 396.

The very course of the lava is still to be seen in a blackened ridge above Giarre, one station from Aci Reale, and twenty-four miles distant from the crater.

The spot is called Bosco d'Aci.

But in spite of this brilliant victory, Catania would not yield. The Carthaginians perished miserably on the promontory of Plemmyrium, Himilcon fled, and Dionysius remained more powerful than ever.

The romantic figure of Pyrrhus appears for a moment, like a passing meteor, at Catania, to be followed by greater Rome. Catania was one of her earliest acquisitions after Syracuse had fallen to Marcellus.

One can judge of what Roman Catania was by her monuments; to be groped for, indeed, now underground and in darkness (the lava has taken care of that), but still existing.

The Roman Amphitheatre of the age of Augustus is under the street of Stesichoros; from its fragments it appears to have been but a little smaller than the Coliseum. The Roman building engrafted on the Greek theatre of Alcibiades and Stesichoros (I forgot to recall that Stesichoros figures on the proscenium as the introducer of lyric music) is very vast; and had its aqueducts for Naumachiæ, as the Greek theatre at Syracuse has its Nymphæum and water-course.

The Roman Forum is under the Cortile San Pantaleone.

A gymnasium near Frederic the Second's lava castle; the basement of a Roman arch in the Corso; and vague remains of aqueducts, baths, and vaults, lie under the modern houses.

These are but names.

Believe me, the theatre is the only monument worth visiting in the dark; the Odeion, situated near it, is interesting only to archæologists.

Much that the lava and earthquakes had spared, was torn down by Theodoric to make his walls, and unhappily Count Roger followed his bad example, for his cathedral.

But whether it be Greek or Carthaginian, Pyrrhus or Rome, Goth or Saracen, throughout

all the changeful conditions of Sicily, Catania, from her position, plays an important part. Sheltered by a great promontory, between two vast seas, and with that wonderfully fertile plain and spacious harbour (before the lava destroyed it), her history is the history of the world!

After Sicily had been overswept by Goth and Visigoth, rushing in on the ruins of Rome, and Belisarius, with easy victory, made the island Byzantine, only to fall, after a long interval, into Saracen hands,—then we have daylight with the Normans, and Catania falls before Robert Guiscard.

"No one," says Freeman, in his valuable chapters, "could have dealt worse with Catania than the first Hohenstaufen, Henry VI. of Germany, when he came to claim the Sicilian crown in right of his wife, Constance.

"Neither age, nor sex, nor calling," says he, quoting Freising's "Chronicle," "neither house nor church was spared in the slaughter, the burning, the carrying into bondage." Not only Henry ill-used Sicily, but his successor, Frederic II., born of a Norman mother, a son of the soil, and professing to love it with as passionate a devotion as the great Count himself. I will say nothing of that dark ruffian, Charles of Anjou, and the Arragonese under Peter.

When the legitimate branch of Norman princes ended abruptly by the execution of Conradin, grandson of Frederic II., by Charles of Anjou at Naples, so well were they beloved, that the illegitimate branch came in, with another Constance, daughter of Manfred, Frederic's natural son, and Sicily fell as a fief to her husband, Peter of Arragon.

CHAPTER XXI.

Catania at the present day.—The Grand Hotel.—Sicilian Cookery.—Stesichoros.—Charondas and Empedocles.

HE Grand Hotel is a stone's throw from the station; you reach it by an omnibus, as in any other city.

In form it is like a huge white box, pierced by windows; in fashion, altogether Teuton, evidenced by its greasy cuisine, saur-kraut, and bacon.

Now, this is too bad, for Sicily is the land of good eating. I will venture to say there is no country in the universe where you can get a better dinner, and better cooked. The Palermitan "chefs" are especially famous for their repertoire of mediæval dishes, excellent in themselves and historical to boot. I take it, that every conquering race in Sicily has left, so to say, its culinary mark.

Of the Benedictine monks at Catania, so

renowned for their table, I shall have to speak. At least the tradition of good living should have been respected.

Otherwise, I have nothing to say against the Grand Hotel. I mention this, because good hotels in Sicily are altogether the exception. It is reasonable too; and the landlord, as gigantic in size as his hotel, an excellent fellow.

Here, for a mere trifle, you may enjoy the comfortable assurance that you are lodged in the island of the blest, in the enjoyment of all the advantages of a Sanatorium, announced by the presence of invalids from many lands, lounging in the sun within a very desolate garden, where the bougainvillias blossom upon open walls, and Etna towers opposite,—without being charged for it in the bill.

And this brings me once more to Etna. You cannot open a chink of the window without its thrusting itself forward as an actual intruder upon your peace of mind. Entering so immediately into practical life, shorn of the majestic beauty I admired so much at Maniace, Etna becomes oppressive and vulgar.

Still it fascinates. I cannot take my eyes off its broad flanks, dotted with white villas, screened by evergreens, nor from "the wooded region," a verdant cincture, six or seven miles

broad. As to the "desert or volcanic region," ashen and death-like, it is absolutely hideous!

What poor Charles Kean styled "local favourites" are Stesichoros, Charondas, and Empedocles. Stesichoros, called the Sicilian Homer, and blind, like the father of poetry, dealt with classic themes, Medea, Hercules, Atalanta, and the siege of Troy. Horace's little hint about him indicates high praise. But what can we tell about a writer whose collected works amounted to twenty-six books, or divisions, when not three consecutive lines remain?

He composed, too, philosophical fables like La Fontaine, and also excelled in depicting the power of love.

In one of his poems, Stesichoros dared to slander Helen of Troy, for which crime he is said to have lost his sight.

But after promptly writing a recantation, in which he declared that only a phantom of Helen went to Troy, he saw again as plainly as before.

We are in the dimmest antiquity about Stesichoros, as also about Charondas, only we conclude that "his laws" must have been written in verse, to be sung at Athenian wine-parties.

Diodorus is very rich about Charondas—a

quaint kind of primitive Solon, who forbade a man who gave his children a step-mother, to legislate in the state, and decreed that whoever proposed a change in the existing laws, should do so standing before the people with a halter round his neck, ready to be hanged if his motion were not carried.

Aristotle celebrates Charondas as the first man who made false witness indictable; a logical conclusion, for, without truth, justice would be impossible.

Charondas' death was as eccentric as his laws.

Going one day into the country near Catania, armed with a knife, to defend himself, says Diodorus, with much *naïveté*, against "brigands" (brigandage in Sicily is of all time), Charondas, on his return into the city, hearing a tumult, runs into the public place to find out what it was, forgetting the knife which he carries.

Now Charondas had made a law forbidding any man to go armed within the city upon pain of death.

"Look at our Charondas," calls out one man to another, from the crowd. "He is a fine fellow; carrying a knife! He is breaking his own laws!"

"No, by Jupiter! Nothing of the kind," answers Charondas. "I die to maintain them!" and with that he plunges the knife into his own breast.

In those early days, five centuries before Christ, lived Empedocles, philanthropist, poet (he wrote a poem called "Nature," in *two thousand verses*), naturalist, physician, and philosopher.

Philosophers of that day united in themselves the knowledge of many arts and sciences, which we, in our narrow, modern views, deem incompatible.

Empedocles came from Acragas, where he is remembered in the name of the new port, at the termination of the railway (Porto Empedocles).

He cut through the hills at the back of the city, to let in a current of fresh air, and drained the marsh of Tiberius as a cure for fever.

His figure, on Etna's side, wandering among the oaks and beeches, clothed in a purple robe, and bearing in his hand a Delphic crown, is as familiar to us as that of Acis or Polyphemus.

As a god, he communed with earth and earth's mysteries—his iron sandals clanking as he trod. Those treacherous sandals! It was on Etna's side, amongst the scented pine woods,

that his ear first caught the sound of Kallichles, the boy-harper of Catania, and found him lying on a bank flower-crowned.

Empedocles has no chronicler like Apollonius of Tyana to raise him to the skies, barring which distinction he celebrates himself in his own verses, as a saviour, to whom the sick and dying came for help.

What were his claims to divine honours is not clear; but in the twilight of the world there was a constant tendency to deify everything beneficent.

At any rate Empedocles was worshipped as a god by the Selinuntians, and his friend Pausanias raised an altar to him.

Whether scientific curiosity about the flames of Etna led Empedocles too near the brink, and he toppled over into the crater, or whether he deliberately flung himself in, as it is said, to sham immortality, and was betrayed by the casting forth of his iron sandal—who can say?

The belief implied in the disappearance of Empedocles is found in many lands. Elijah was whirled away, like Pluto, in a fiery chariot; Apollonius of Tyana was not; and Lycurgus, to preserve his laws, mysteriously vanished.

CHAPTER XXII.

Public Buildings and Gardens.—Eruptions of Etna.—Irrepressible Catania.

MORE hopelessly modern city and more monotonous, I never beheld! I feel it a personal wrong that "the eldest daughter of Grecian Naxos" should look so white and new. I specify "*white*" as applying to the principal thoroughfares; the cross alleys and narrower streets are of lava, and as black as pitch.

Yet, apart from classic associations, Catania is spacious and imposing, with its two miles of "Strada Stesicorea" (the upper portion where the flanks of Etna rise from the pavement called "Strada Etna," after the fashion set by Hiero) crossed by the Corso, twin-brother to Stesicorea, and each parallel to the four points of the compass.

Handsome ranges of palaces border these streets, very new and very vast; specially

notable, the Biscari Palace, containing a fine collection of relics dug out of the lava: Greek sarcophagi, bronzes, sculpture, vases, and terra cottas. Church domes, pinnacles, and towers rise behind; Catania possesses a hundred churches, there is a glittering cathedral as a vista to the Strada Stesicorea, also several theatres; one so large that, like the Campo Santo at Messina, it will never be finished.

There are showy shops full of nothing, the finest harbour in the world destroyed by lava, a population of ninety thousand souls, and the smallest newspaper I ever beheld, quite a curiosity, published twice a week, and with a notice on the front sheet, that "if subscribers do not pay punctually, their names will be posted up." Why, a backwood settlement three months old would beat this.

What is called the "Marina," is a filthy garden under railway arches.

When I visited it, I found a frightful stench and a very feeble band playing; stench and band accepted with equal favour by the company.

But *en revanche* the new Bellini Garden (Bellini is the modern god of Catania, his native city) at the other end of the town under Etna, is charming; the prettiest thing in all Catania,

which I always liken in my own mind to a stiff white pattern traced on a black sampler.

All this is Etna's fault. Catania is what Etna permits it to be. You may calculate the period of the last eruption from the aspect of the streets, just as in Paris you can fix the date of the last Revolution by the girth of the trees on the Boulevards.

I do not know whether Etna is also responsible for the immorality. At Genoa, it is said—

> "Sea without fish,
> Mountains without trees,
> Women without shame,
> And men without honour."

The first traditional eruption of Etna dates from before the Trojan war, when the Sicani are said to have retired from the neighbourhood of Naxos, and the Siculi took their place. The first historical eruption occurred in the time of Pythagoras, six centuries before Christ. Then we have the legend of the Pii Frates, Amphinomos and Anapios, who by turns bore their father out of danger, as Æneas bore Anchises out of Troy.

Pausanius saw the Pii Frates drawn at Delphi by Polygnôtos. They are recorded by Strabo, says Freeman, furnished Claudian with an idyll, Pindar with a poem, Apollonius of

Tyana with the materials for a long sermon, and Æschylus with a play—the Ætneia.

That Æschylus and Pindar should celebrate Etna, town and mountain—Pindar speaking of the mountain as that "snowy pillar vomiting forth purest fountains of unapproachable fire—" is but natural. Both poets were living at Hiero's (Ætneus') court but a few years after an eruption.

It was the eruption of 1669 which destroyed Catania. The morning of the 18th of March, broke, says Dennis, as though the sun were eclipsed. A furious whirlwind shook the island, and earthquakes upheaved the soil.

At Nicosia, half-way up Etna, people could not stand upon their feet. Everything rolled as on ship-board. In an hour or two, Nicosia itself lay a heap of ruins; then amid the din of labouring nature, eight fresh craters opened beneath the cone, pouring forth lava, sand, and stones to the height of twelve hundred feet.

From these eight new craters a stream two miles wide poured down the mountain, dividing itself mid-way into two currents: one running west towards Palermo and the plain of Simeto, the other precipitating itself over Catania into the sea. Hissing, roaring,

seething, the two rival elements meet, clash, and battle.

Neptune, as is meet he should in the tripart island of Sicily, conquers! The waves arrest the fiery element. A lava wall, forty feet high, fills up the port, and a new black promontory runs out half a mile to sea, in advance of the old coast-line.

For *four* months Catania lay besieged by a sea of lava; a city of Dita, such as Dante paints in the "Inferno."

Over and above the lava, there is an earthquake, which, without waiting for Etna's slower proceedings, lays the whole city in ruins, and kills eighteen hundred people.

Two years after, in opening out the lava, flames burst forth. Eight years later hot mists rise from it after rain.

The fears of the first Greek settlers at Naxos were fully justified. "They feared to go further south," says Diodorus, "on account of volcanoes."

They were right.

It is an ill wind which blows no one any good.

"Se Catania averse Porto,
Palermo surei morto,"

says the proverb.

Strange to say, after the awful experience of 1669, and so many other awful experiences ever since the time of Pythagoras and the sixth century B.C., the Catanians persist in rebuilding the city on precisely the same lines!

We have a Catania of the time of the Trojan war, of Alcibiades and the Athenians, of Himilcon the Carthaginian, whose advance was checked by the lava, as far down as Naxos; a Catania of the civil wars of Cæsar and Pompey, of the Emperor Caligula, whom the roar of Etna, as far off as at Messina, frightened away from Sicily; a Catania of the time of Titus, and also of Decius, when people were Christians, and the merits of St. Agatha's veil was tested in an eruption; a Catania of the time of Frederic II. and of Charles of Anjou; and, lastly, a Catania of William the Good, 1169 (William, third in succession from the great Count Roger), when, in a single instant, Catania became a heap of ruins, including the Norman Cathedral, the bishop, and his congregation!

Yes! Hiero's Ætnea is a city of fire, according to its name—was, is, and ever will be. God help the people!

And the insolence and the caprices of the lava!

In a quarter of the city called the Gambayita,

where the walls are thirty feet high and very thick, a spring of water was embedded. A century later, the want of this particular spring being felt, search was made for it, and the lava hewn out, when the living waters were discovered, cool and abundant as ever!

The mediæval castle, too, a grimy-looking edifice, by turns the Hohenstaufen Palace, Arragonese Parliament, and general city fortress, built by Frederic II. from the wreck of the city walls, close to the harbour, now stands high and dry in the middle of the town.

The Saracens styled Etna Mongibello, and "dreaded it exceedingly." To them it was a fetish or devil, to be exorcised and worshipped like the Palician gods.

CHAPTER XXIII.

Military Friends.—Catanian Bluebeards.—A Mysterious Elephant.—The Cathedral.—St. Agatha.

O-DAY I have had three telegrams from General de Sonnaz, commander-in-chief of the army of Italy in Sicily.

"If you come while I am there," said this most fascinating of men and bravest of soldiers, "I will take care of you."

"Brigands! No, not with me. Nonsense; you shall have a regiment of Bersaglieri to escort you, if you like."

"No," say I, "not a regiment."

"Well, then, half a regiment. Understand me, I guarantee your safety. You shall go everywhere, see everything. Trust me."

When this was said a year ago, we were walking, General de Sonnaz and I, up and down the Pancaldi Baths at Leghorn.

And he has kept his word!

Three telegrams from Palermo this very day, telling me what to do and where to go. I am waited on everywhere by the authorities like royalty. At Messina I had an invitation to stay in the house of the Prefect.

The Prefect there, and the General here, the latter in uniform, presented themselves on my arrival. (Now, I am quite come to despise prefects and simple generals, as I have commanders-in-chief and generals of division awaiting my pleasure.)

Marchese X—— commands at Catania. He has just called with his two aides-de-camp, in the whitest of gloves and with the politest of manners. And he is such a nice, fat, fatherly general, Marchese X——, so anxious to please the friend of de Sonnaz, there is nothing he will not do for me; even going into the question of my luggage with the patience of a benevolent courier! (You are only allowed to travel with a certain amount of kilos. in Sicily.)

Nothing would do but that Marchese X—— must return in the evening in his open carriage, to show me the effect of the gas in the long lines, Strada Stesicorea and the Corso ditto, a blaze in the Elephant Square, and the cafés more brilliant than Paris boulevards.

A most agreeable man, Marchese X——, and full of pleasant gossip.

Catanian husbands, according to him, are real tigers. One is known to lock his wife into her carriage when he cannot accompany her in her drive up and down the Corso; another reads his wife's letters first, even those from her mother.

"We Piedmontese despise such espionnage," says General X——, who has a remarkably handsome Marchesa; "if our wives are honest, *bene;* if not, we cannot force them into virtue! These Catanian nobles are full of Arab blood, only half civilized."

"No lady here is seen walking [this I had noticed myself] after a certain early hour, say, two o'clock, then only in the side streets, avoiding the cafés and the thoroughfares. If she meets a gentleman of her acquaintance, and the gentleman accosts her, her reputation is 'gone for ever!'"

At this, General, Marchese, X—— laughs, thinking of the civilized freedom of Turin; his two aides-de-camp, Captains Cavalotti and Franchetti, laugh also, and both opine that Sicily is a barbarous country, a thousand years behind Northern Italy.

At the bottom of the Strada Stesicorea I

find a thoroughly Italian square, large, white, and uniform. On one side is the Cathedral, in the centre "the Elephant."

Now "the Elephant" is a mysterious quadruped, bearing on its back the name of a certain "Heliodorus," Diodorus, or "Diotro." It is carved in lava smaller than life, and accommodated with tusks and a houdah of white marble, on the top of which is an obelisk covered with hieroglyphics.

Whence the elephant came from, and who Heliodorus, Diodorus, or Diotro is—Byzantine, Greek, Bishop, Jew, or Magician, is not known.

Did Agathocles' Egyptian wife, asks Freeman, bring him in her pocket? Or the Crusaders? I ask. Was he imported under Maniace? Or he a Meta in a Roman circus? —or an idol?

As to the Cathedral, when I saw it bristling with barocco ornamentation—Tritons, Nereids, Centaurs, foliage, gargoyles, capped by a frieze from the Greek theatre, had I followed my inclination I should have turned and fled!

Barocco has a "*faux air*" of the cinquecento, deformed and exaggerated into burlesque. Such as might be the graceful carracoles of a racehorse, compared to the ungainly antics of a mule.

People tell me Barocco is picturesque; so is a red brick wall, or a cupola, scaled with coloured tiles.

I hate shams.

Now Barocco is the apotheosis of shams, executed by artists who, without power to create themselves, ape and distort the creations of genius.

Not even the fact that the Cathedral was founded by my favourite, Count Roger, can reconcile me to it. Its real date is 1757, when the sham style was rampant in Sicily. Some blackened arches at the east end, and a lancet window or two, are all that remain of the original structure, destroyed in the reign of William the Good by an eruption.

If the outside is overcharged, the interior is singularly cold and nude. St. Agatha is the presiding goddess, as one may say—as is Santa Lucia at Syracuse, and Santa Rosalia at Palermo. St. Agatha doubles her part with that of a virgin goddess.

Her chapel, where she stands, a female St. Michael, with a dragon at her feet, blazes out on one side of the bare walls. A silver chest contains her relics, and the wonder-working veil, which so distinctly drove back the lava from Catania, A.D. 254.

Until then, the Virgin ruled in Catania, as in Messina. But after showing herself so thoroughly incompetent on that occasion, she was publicly dethroned and repudiated, and the maid Agatha installed in her place.

It is in the year A.D. 251, and Decius is Emperor.

St. Paul has long ago landed at Syracuse, on his way to Rome, and Vesuvius, not to be behindhand with Etna, overwhelmed the cities of Pompeii and Herculaneum, B.C. 79.

As Sicily has been a Roman province some forty years, all these events come to affect Catania more or less, especially the landing of St. Paul, for now the city has a Christian bishop and a Christian Church, like Syracuse, and all Sicily might have been converted, only with Decius have come cruel days, when to be a "Nazarene" is death.

At this time the young Roman Prætor, Quintianus, loved a Catanian maid, named Agatha. But Agatha, consecrated to God from her earliest youth, would not listen to his suit.

As a Christian, Agatha was absolutely in his power. Had she returned his love, the young Prætor would have little cared whether she worshipped Jupiter or Christ; but, as it was, he became a red-hot persecutor.

Will Agatha yield or not? (He gives her a last chance.) "No." Will she die the death of a martyr and a slave? Yes, a thousand times, Yes!

Despised love often turns to bitterest hate; so it was with Quintianus.

The fair Catanian, tall and comely, her golden hair abroad upon her shoulders; her large blue eyes full of sweetness, as pictured at her altar, by Bernardius Græcus, 1588, is dragged by the lictors, naked, to the judgment-seat of her lover.

The rounded apse of the Basilica is filled with soldiers, hard, wolfish-eyed, and sensual.

In front, between the fasces, on his curule chair, sits Quintianus, wrapped in a purple toga, hemmed with gold: the golden eagles and wreaths of victory behind.

Agatha gives Quintianus no time to address her.

"Take me, Lord Christ," she cries, clasping her hands, and raising her eyes to heaven. "I am Thine. Do with me as Thou wilt. Like Agnes, I am Thy lamb; lead me to the sacrifice."

She weeps, she cries; not for sorrow, but for shame.

Quintianus, maddened by the sight of all

that grace and beauty, condemns her, not to death, but to infamy. But the Catanian maid comes pure out of the ordeal.

After another month, Agatha is again summoned before the Prætor. Whatever mercy was in his heart, fanned by the hope that degradation and shame might conquer her, has fled.

She stands before him a common culprit. In answer to his interrogations, she has but one reply, "I am a Christian."

This time Agatha is led to prison.

We know where that is. The Santo Carcere, as it is called, in memory of the saint, is near the Via Stesicorea, underground, not far from the remains of the vast circle of the Roman Amphitheatre.

Above the spot is a modern church, pilastered, white-washed, and frescoed, like the rest; only there is a rare Norman portal, which has survived perils of earthquakes and lava, from the time of William the Good.

The little cell, where Agatha lay, is built into the city walls. Within, on a block of lava, is the impress of two dainty feet: her footmarks, as is devoutly believed by the Catanese, when she was flung into the prison.

A third time Agathã is summoned before Quintianus. A third time she cries out, "I am

of Christ!" This is too much for the outraged lover. The valiant Agatha is stretched upon the rack, and her fair body wrenched and torn with red-hot hooks and pincers. Her courage is immense.

"Lord, take me!" she cries, as long as she can speak. "I am Thine!"

It is a horrible struggle between brute force and woman's fortitude.

Still she lives, and still she cries.

"Silence that woman's voice by agony!" shouts Quintianus, a very Herod in his vengeance.

Her virgin breast is to be cut off, Quintianus says it.

"Monster!" shrieks Agatha, writhing on the rack, in the hands of the Roman lictors. "Are you not ashamed—you, who have sucked the paps of a woman's breast yourself?"

Carried back to her cell, Agatha is comforted by the presence of an angel, who dresses her wounds.

Then she makes this prayer: "Lord, my Creator, Thou hast protected me from my cradle. Receive my soul."

And so she sweetly dies.

Her relics, carried to Constantinople by our friend General George Maniace, were brought

back to Catania, in the reign of Roger, son of the Great Count.

Saint Agatha La Vetere, on the site of Count Roger's original cathedral, is the spot where Agatha suffered torture. There is her tomb.

But it is in the Barocco Cathedral you must look for her remains.

Twice a year the silver chest is taken from the altar and placed upon a car, to be carried in triumph through the city.

The Catanian citizens, prostrate on the stones, line the streets by thousands, to see her pass.

Hymns are sung in her honour, bands play, trumpets sound, and tall tapers glisten!

CHAPTER XXIV.

San Benedetto.—The House of San Niccolò on Etna.—Adventures of an Austrian Prince.—A Benedictine General.—The Supper.—The Sleep and the Awakening.

I AM just returned from a drive, escorted by a hoary rascal of a cicerone, with a swollen face, and a grizzly beard. Beware of him!

We started vaguely in a one-horse shay, to look after a temple of Ceres.

Such a thing does not exist in Catania. He knew it, the wretch! It was only an excuse to jolt me miles over dangerous lava-roads, at so much an hour.

The horse, like his driver, trained to idleness, drawled on hopelessly until we landed in a vast piazza, before the Church of St. Benedict.

St. Benedict is the great modern sight of Catania. A glaring, semicircular building of

enormous size spread out upon a rise. Of course it is Barocco, the only architecture permitted by the lava.

The façade is imposing, but essentially common-place. Through what seemed to me miles of corridors, and pillared galleries, and countless courts, I was led by a monk, robed in white flannel, to a gaudy church, 550 feet in length—a kind of court ball-room, glittering with chandeliers.

"No one lights them now," says the monk, with a sigh, as he sees my eyes travelling round the desert of variegated marble, agate, jasper, mosaics, silver-gilt reliefs, stalls of carved walnut-wood, and glaring wall frescoes.

"The King of Naples used to have his rooms in the Abbots' quarter. Then we had masses sung every day, at all the altars. An orchestra came from the opera-house of San Carlo at Naples, to play for us. And candles, ah! myriads of wax-candles. No one looked to the cost when the King and Queen were here. Humbert and his Consorte came once—*ma chè*" (a gesture of supreme contempt occurs here). "They stayed two days, and spent nothing. *Diamine!* We are fallen on evil days!"

In the church is the finest organ in the world; Dennis says finer than at Haarlem or

Lucerne. Now at Lucerne, I can personally answer that the thunder and earthquake stops are the most appalling combination of sound human ear ever listened to.

If the Benedictine convent is the great sight of Catania, "the garden of the miracle" is the great sight of the convent, matching in miraculousness the Pii Frates and the veil of St. Agatha.

It is clear that our monk thinks so. With a species of ecstasy he points to a black lava pile, close upon a flowery grove of paulonias and pepper trees, and explains that here the fiery flood of 1669 turned aside of its own accord, out of respect to the house of St. Benedict.

Before this palatial establishment was built in Catania, the Benedictine monks, lovers of mountain-summits and free-air, had, as early as the sixth century, settled themselves on the slopes of Etna, within "the wooded zone," near Nicosia. But after enduring the havoc of three separate eruptions, they deserted the treacherous volcano, and came down here.

Anent this change of locality, a curious tale is told. (N.B. It is not my invention.)

A certain Austrian, Prince Wrede, started from Prague on his travels southward. Being

at Rome, he went on to Naples, and from thence sailed to Messina and Catania.

Now the Prince's object in visiting Sicily must not be misunderstood. He was not a savant; he was actuated by no religious zeal in what he was about to do. He was simply a hard-headed, somewhat eccentric Austrian, fond of good eating, and an amateur of ancient monasteries, especially those of the Benedictine order.

Also he had been told that the finest quails in the world were shot on Etna in their passage from Africa, and that the Benedictine church and hospice of San Niccolò, near Nicosia, was one of the most ancient monastic establishments in the south of Europe.

At Rome he had provided himself with a letter from Cardinal Orsini to the Benedictine superior.

There is now a good road from Catania to Nicosia, ziz-zagging twelve miles up the side of Etna; I can see it from the Hotel, but a hundred years ago this was nothing but a mule track.

At Nicosia you enter into what is called La Boschiva, consisting of oak, beech, and chestnut forests. For miles and miles there are nothing but trees, lava boulders, extinct

craters, and broom. A fine turf grows between into which the foot sinks like a carpet.

Near Nicosia are the "Tre Castagne," mere tree-shells of unknown antiquity, and standing beneath them you have a bird's-eye view over the plains of Catania and the sea.

If the trees were bigger, La Boschiva would be like an English park, but as the woods are all wind-tossed, scorched, and stunted, it is a very desolate place indeed, especially to be avoided in those days, as infested by banditti and *mal viventi* of all descriptions.

Prince Wrede had been told at Rome to go to the Convent of San Niccolò on Etna. He knew of no other convent or monastic establishment bearing the same name in the city; when, however, he went out to engage a mule for the ascent, the muleteer seemed greatly surprised and quite puzzled him by his questions.

Was he *sure* where he wanted to go? "Was it to the Convent of San Niccolò or to the Hospice of San Niccolò?"

The Prince not understanding the Sicilian dialect, explained as well as he could that he desired to visit the Benedictine establishment on Etna, but still the muleteer hesitated to comply. "*Pago bene*," repeated Prince Wrede

to all the muleteer's objections, which he did not in the least understand. "*Pago bene.*"

These words, spoken in a loud voice and in an imperious manner, seemed to decide the muleteer. "Try to talk Italian, instead of that infernal gibberish," added the Prince, availing himself of the good impression his repeated offers of money had made, at which the Sicilian bowed low and kissed his hand.

But when a little later he saw the Prince's boxes spread out on the ground, his astonishment again returned.

"Does your Excellency really intend carrying all that with you?" (As the muleteer now spoke in Italian, he and the Prince could understand each other perfectly.)

"Certainly," was the reply; "every article."

"Your Excellency has friends up there," and he pointed to Etna.

"I have a letter for the General?"

"For the Captain, your Excellency?"

"No. For the General, I say. Now don't stand here talking and losing time. I know it is a long climb; but, *Pago bene!* you understand."

"I don't doubt that," answered the Sicilian, greatly exercised in his mind; "or that your Excellency intends to keep his word, but as we

are both here safe at the present time, would you mind giving me the money beforehand? I should prefer it in case of accidents."

"What accidents?" asked the Prince, sharply.

"Well," and the muleteer looked up Etna, then rubbed his nose, and last of all winked, a familiarity the Prince showed he resented, "Accidents do happen on Etna. Before we get up it will be midnight. I should like to come back at once. If the Excellency pleases it will be better to pay me now."

"Do they sup as late as midnight?" asked the Prince, thinking of the quails at San Niccolò.

"Oh! certainly, at midnight. Much more likely to find them eating by night than day."

"Capital!" cried the Prince, rubbing his hands and looking quite condescending. "How cool it will be! The very time for a good supper! Here is your money, muleteer."

"Mille grazie," said the honest fellow, taking off his scarlet cap. "Now I can start off back as soon as you arrive, and run down the hill to Nicosia in no time."

The first part of the ascent was made in silence. The orange-groves and olive-grounds,

and all those innumerable little white houses dotted about Catania, were soon left far below; then their path lay over the lava till they came to the little town of Nicosia.

As they made a short halt here, all the peasants turned out to stare at them, and one old woman said: "Many people go to San Niccolò by force, but you are the first I ever knew go there of their own accord! *Dio vi benedica.*"

But Prince Wrede was thinking too deeply about the quails to heed her.

The little town of Nicosia, looking from Catania like a white rag hung up on a peg, now consists of two rows of black huts, built very near the ground. It has suffered so fearfully from whirlwinds and earthquakes, that the Nicosians build as low as possible, for safety. There is a magnificent view. You can see all the indentations of the beautiful straits on both sides, down to Aci, Giarre, and Mascoli on one side, Capes Spartivento and Delle Armi, Reggio and Scilla on the other; the peaks of the Taurus Mountains over Taormina, the great blanched city of Catania spread out upon the plain, the Point and Bay of Agosta, the Bay of Thapsus, and so on, to the heights of Hybla.

Before the Prince had left Nicosia night had

come on. There was no moon, and but little light on the horizon; but as the muleteer and the mules appeared to know the way, this did not matter. About a quarter of a mile distant, they made a sharp turn to the right, into what seemed to be a dry torrent-bed. Here the path ended. After scrambling for some time among the stones, a black mass barred their progress.

"Behold the Convent of San Niccolò," said the muleteer, speaking under his breath, and crossing himself.

"What a dismal place!" exclaimed the Prince; "it is like a prison."

"We can still return to Nicosia, if the Excellency likes," whispered the Sicilian, eagerly. "No one is about; no one has heard us. It will be much better to sleep at Nicosia, believe me."

"I have given you my orders," answered the Prince, stiffly. "Go on; I am hungry."

At this, the muleteer gave his mule a savage cut on the back, and, with a little more climbing, they stood before the door. Near at hand the building looked to the Prince more like a fortress than a monastery. It was partly in ruins; and every eruption, since the time of the great Count Roger, seemed to have left its mark upon the walls.

"Knock," said the Prince to the muleteer; "what are you staring at?"

The sound of the iron knocker rang out hollow in the night. A little bell, a long way off, was heard to ring, then there was a sound of footsteps. A window, low in the wall, opened, the barrel of a musket was directed full upon the Prince, who was close to the entrance, and a rough voice asked, "Who are you?"

"A friend," answered Prince Wrede, calmly putting aside the musket-barrel with one hand, and raising his hat with the other. "You are quite right," he added, "to be cautious in such solitude, and not to admit strangers. I do not blame you. I should do the same in your place; but you need not be afraid of me, I have a letter from Cardinal Orsini to your General."

"For our Captain?"

"No, no; for your General."

"Ah! that is the same thing, General or Captain. Are you alone?"

"I am," answered the Prince.

"Wait then, and I will come and unbar the door."

Meanwhile the muleteer had quietly disappeared.

"What a delicious smell," exclaimed Prince Wrede, as the door opened.

"I am glad you like it," said the owner of the rough voice, in a very sulky tone, still holding his musket dangerously near the Prince. "You smell our Captain's supper; he will be back directly. By the way, do you know him?"

"Here is a letter addressed to the Most Reverend the General of the Benedictines, at the Convent of San Niccolò at Catania."

"Ah! now I understand," cried the monk, a broad grin parting his thick lips. "Capisco! Si! Si! He! He!" and, quite condescendingly, he laughed until his sides shook.

Unobservant as was the Prince, the interior of the convent did strike him as very strange. Oak-trees were growing up inside the ruined walls; grass was everywhere; not a cross, crucifix, or altar to be seen.

The monk, seeing his perplexity, explained that it was only their country convent, their *villegiatura*. "Besides the Hospice," he added, "we have a splendid establishment down at Catania."

"Ah!" exclaimed the Prince, greatly annoyed, "no one told me that; perhaps I was mistaken in coming here; but, at all events, here I am, and here I must spend the night. Mean-

time," a bright thought struck him, "would you allow me to go down to the kitchen and see what there is for supper?"

"Upon my word, I see no objection," replied the monk, his lips once more parted with a broad grin. "I will show you the way; but tell me, first, how much money have you in your purse?"

"Three thousand five hundred lire."

"Ah! then," muttered the man, half aloud, "I'm sure the Captain will be glad to see you!"

In the kitchen Prince Wrede found a cook, dressed in white, double his own size, busy before the fire.

He was just about to ask this giant how he cooked his quails, when an exclamation from the latter caused him to turn his head. A tall, dark man, dressed in the full Benedictine habit, was standing immovable behind him.

"Ah! The General! General," said the Prince, tearing himself from the contemplation of the quails, "I am delighted to see you? You have an excellent cook, he has got quails for supper!"

"Are you Prince Wrede?" asked the General, fixing upon him a pair of eyes that glistened like coals.

"Yes, General, at your service. I am a

student of history, especially of the history of Benedictine convents. I know all about this place better, perhaps, than you do," added the Prince with a smile.

A smile passed over the General's face also, but it was not a pleasant smile.

"These Sicilian monks are queer fellows," thought the Prince; "they all seem alike, sulky and silent; nothing at all of the amenity of the Churchman about them, I suppose it is the wild life and Etna."

When the General and the Prince reached the top of the stairs, the whole community had assembled. There were about thirty monks, not one pleasant to look at. They all wore their white cowls drawn over their heads, except the superior, who, uncovered, led the way into a well-lit refectory, where a long table was laid for supper.

The Prince, who had all his wits about him, was astounded at the splendour of the plate and the fineness of the linen. The refectory itself had evidently been the ancient church. An open hearth filled the place of the altar, and the niches for saints were ornamented with fire-arms.

"The most self-denying Benedictines, I ever knew," thought the Prince to himself,

"and who best carry out the precepts of their great founder."

"Prince!" said the General, seeing the admiration depicted on his countenance as he gazed around, "I really must apologize for a very bad supper, but you gave me no notice. I am afraid, too, our country habits will surprise you. Every brother eats with a pair of pistols beside his plate, and there is a sentinel at the door as a precaution. Pray excuse us if we do not alter our custom even in the presence of so illustrious a guest!"

"I should be shocked to disarrange you in any way," was the Prince's courteous answer.

Upon this the General threw open his robe, took a superb pair of inlaid pistols from his belt, and laid them upon the table.

"Excellent!" cried the Prince, watching him; "I like the idea vastly! Pistols are the traveller's best friends. I have a pair also; I will put them beside my plate, if one of your obliging monks will be kind enough to fetch them."

"Another day, another day," said the superior, taking his place. "Sit opposite to me, Prince! Can you say a 'Benedicite?'"

"I could formerly, but I am afraid I have forgotten it."

"What a pity," returned the General. "I reckoned upon you; I fear we neglect it, and to-day the chaplain is absent. So if you cannot help me, with your permission we will omit grace altogether!"

Prince Wrede ate both his supper and his quails with the appetite of a long-fasting man, helping himself at the same time to copious draughts of Marsala, a wine to which he was now introduced for the first time. So delicious did he find it, that he paid no attention to the repeated warnings of the General, that it was a very heady wine. To this and to his ignorance of the Sicilian dialect may be attributed the fact that he listened but carelessly to the talk of the monks. Yet they told the strangest stories —all about brigands, convents sacked, ransoms paid, and gens d'armes shot.

After the Marsala, came Isola and Muscat; the Prince drank of all these until he fell into a half sleep.

Was it true or was it a dream? Did the monks throw off their robes and transform themselves into brigands, with pointed hats, knee-breeches, embroidered jackets, and endless poniards and pistols stuck into their belts?

Did the General rap the table with a naked dagger, throw over the lamp, and order a door

to be opened, upon which three prisoners appeared, at whom he took deliberate aim, standing in his place, their blood flowing down the refectory in a crimson stream ?

At length the Prince's eyes closed in heavy slumber; nor could he open them, nor had he the power to sit upright. His last recollection was an effort to rise and free himself from the horrible blood which had collected in pools about his feet. But his legs failed him, and he fell heavily, dead drunk, upon the floor.

When he awoke it was broad daylight, and he was lying under an oak, at the edge of the Boschiva, or wooded region, the flat roofs of Nicosia peeping out beneath. Beside him, on the grass, lay all his luggage, untouched, even to his pipe; and in the valise his purse containing the exact sum he had placed in it on leaving Catania!

Within was a letter, which he eagerly opened; it was addressed :—

"To His Excellency the Prince Wrede.

"I have a thousand excuses to make you for the suddenness of my departure, but important affairs call me to Cefalù. I hope you will not forget that the hospitality you received from the monks of San Niccolò, was, however unworthy of your acceptance, the best they could

offer. When you write to Cardinal Orsini, I beg you to recommend us to his prayers.

"You will find all your luggage, except your pistols; these, I trust, you will permit me to retain as a souvenir of your visit.

"GASPARONE.

"General of the Monastery of San Niccolò upon Etna."

The Prince turned homewards, a wiser and a sadder man. Years after, he saw in a newspaper that the "famous brigand chief, Gasparone, had been captured by the Neapolitan troops, after a desperate resistance, to the great joy of Nicosia, Catania, and the whole of the two Calabrias."

ADDENDUM.

THE following reference to Taormina belongs properly to page 120:—

Speaking of the heights of Mola, brings me to Dionysius the Elder. If anything can render the Mola rock more terrible, it is a vision of that awful tyrant creeping up through the snow, like a wild beast in search of prey, one winter's night, to enjoy the pastime of butchering the garrison, B.C. 394.

Dionysius had levelled fair Naxos to the sand. He had sold the inhabitants as slaves, and given back the Grecian site to the native Siculi. These had wisely refused the gift, and stuck to their impregnable fortress at Mola.

Now the fickle tyrant, having for some reason or other, quarrelled with the Siculi also, determines, impossible as it appears, to lay siege to their strong place of Mola. Looking at it with modern eyes it would seem pretty much like laying siege to the moon!

Diodorus, in his confused way, describes Dionysius as besieging "Naxos." He does not distinguish

though a Sicilian, between the Greek city on the shore and the Siculian fortress above. But the Siculi well understood the difference. They knew that since the arrival of the Greek the coast was lost to them, and they had re-entered into their ancient seat, resolved to defend it to the death.

While the fortress of Mola frowned down, inaccessible and grim, "the winter solstice arrived," says Diodorus, and Dionysius remarking that the Siculi were careless in mounting guard, took advantage of one dark and stormy night to climb that perpendicular track; the same which still leads up to the miserable little hamlet of Mola. (I can give no personal record of this track; I can only repeat from Diodorus.)

After surmounting the difficulties of a path over acute precipices, a snow-storm beating in front, freezing both face and eyes, Dionysius reached the summit and forced the castle gate, but the natives, massing themselves together, pushed upon his troops, and drove them headlong down. Dionysius himself, carried along by the pressure, was floored by a blow on his cuirass, and narrowly escaped being made prisoner. The Siculi on the heights killed six hundred Syracusans, and Dionysius was only saved by his armour!

Thus says honest Diodorus, user of no ornamental adjectives or picturesque phrases.

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